

# BREAKING GROUND

NUMBER 73 | MARCH 2014



## IN THIS EDITION:

Calling the Community  
Together for Employment

## FUN FOR EVERYONE:

Creating Social,  
Inclusive, Networking  
Connections

## CONTENTS



- 1 **Volunteers Providing Accessible Transportation - Why Can't This Work Everywhere?**
- 4 **Recognizing the Value of Internships in Successful Job Placement**
- 6 **Towards a LEANer Government**
- 7 **Meet Our New Council Member: Bob Plummer**
- 8 **Uncovering New Pathways to Employment through Community Conversations**
- 10 **Calling the Community Together in Lawrenceburg to Talk About Employment**
- 11 **Fun For Everyone! Social Inclusive Networking Connections**
- 12 **Employment First Task Force**
- 13 **2013-14 Partners in Policymaking**
- 14 **Breaking Ground Interview with Charlotte Bryson, Retiring Executive Director, Tennessee Voices for Children**

**Cover photo:** Social INC participants, Drew Shortt, Aaron Hiscutt and Briley Rowe, purchase items for food buckets to be shipped to Liberia. Photo by Cynthia R. Chambers, PhD.

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities proudly announces a new Community Development Grant. This fund is available to Tennesseans with disabilities and their families, and provides assistance to visit and research innovative disability-related programs in other states. Upon their return, the grant provides recipients with a small stipend to implement their Plan of Action toward replicating and sustaining a similar program in their community here in Tennessee.

We invite our Breaking Ground readers to visit [www.tn.gov/cdd](http://www.tn.gov/cdd) to find out more information about this opportunity, and to download an application.

# Volunteers Providing Accessible Transportation

## Why Can't This Work Everywhere?

by Ned Andrew Solomon

It seems in Knoxville, in terms of accessible public transportation, the wheels are rolling.

One of the most successful and innovative programs is the Volunteer Assisted Transportation program, VAT for short. At the VAT volunteers drive (it's in the title after all) but they don't use their own vehicles, nor do they have any out-of-pocket expenses that need to be reimbursed. This also ensures that the vehicles are properly maintained, and the drivers don't have to incur significant wear and tear on their personal automobiles.

### Door-through-door service

Even better, the VAT provides door-through-door service to those Knox County residents who require assistance

“The volunteer driver will go in and assist the rider at the beginning of the trip, ensure safe boarding into the vehicle, go with the rider to the appointment and stay with them, as needed.”

to travel safely. Sounds dangerous, right? But here's how it works. There's curb to curb fixed route service, like buses. Taxi cabs typically provide door to door service. Door-through-door service allows much more flexibility, and a lot more support for the rider, who may be a senior or have a significant physical disability. "If needed, and of course invited, the drivers are trained to also act as the individual escort for the



Volunteer Ramona Ladd-Burum assists Ms. Nettie Holt.

rider," explained Warren Secret, who is the director of VAT. "The volunteer driver will go in and assist the rider at the beginning of the trip, ensure safe boarding into the vehicle, go with the rider to the appointment and stay with them, as needed. They don't go into the examining room of course, but they will wait in the waiting room, standing by to return them home, including any needed stops along the way."

About 60-65% of the VAT excursions are for medical appointments; 20% of the rides are grocery store or other shopping related errands. In other words, this transportation service is generally used for "essential" stuff, but social and recreational trips are permitted as well. And, if it's for a good cause like filling up the fridge, the volunteer goes all out. "The driver will actually go into the supermarket with the rider and assist with the purchase of the groceries, bearing in mind that every individual is different, and needs different levels of support," said Secret. "Then the driver will help bring the groceries or packages into the house and put them in the kitchen or the most appropriate place."

### Sounds too good to be true, right? But in this case, it's absolutely true!

In fact, the following kind of story happens more often than you'd think. VAT took a woman in her 90s every

Continued on page 2

# Volunteer Assisted Transportation

Continued from page 1

Thursday for a couple of years to her beauty salon appointment. She was beginning to get forgetful, so the driver would go into the household; make sure she had her coat, her keys, her purse; make sure the door was locked; and then escort her down a fairly rickety entranceway into the vehicle. The driver would leave her in the salon with the hairdresser, and come back about 45 minutes later. "On the way home, it came to pass that she really liked to stop and pick up a fast food burger or a baked potato from Wendy's," said Secrest. "So that just became part of the trip. Then we would escort her into the house, make sure her keys were put in the right place, and then – this I love – make sure the remote control was next to her chair that she was going to sit in to eat her fast food meal."

## A coordinated effort

VAT is under the umbrella of the CAC (Community Action Committee) which was formed between the municipalities of Knoxville and Knox County in 1964. With a total budget of about \$40 million, the CAC operates multiple programs in Knox County. CAC's Office on Aging, which developed VAT, also manages the Mobile Meals Program (Meals on Wheels elsewhere); the National Service Corps Group, which includes Senior Companions and Foster Grandparents; the area's 211 system; the O'Conner Senior Center; PAWS – Placing Animals with Seniors; CHIPS – Computers for Homebound and Isolated People; and Senior Service Information & Referral, among many others.

The CAC also operates CAC Transit, which provides transportation throughout Knox County. The city is served by Knoxville Area Transit, which has fixed route and complementary paratransit service. All three transportation entities work hand-in-hand in an accessible transportation coalition, which meets periodically to discuss how to increase the level of accessible transportation options in the area.

## These folks are really thinking about this stuff!

As manager of VAT, Secrest is an employee of the CAC, but VAT relies on its own independent funding



through the Federal Transit Administration, the Tennessee Department of Transportation, community contributions, and some local match coming from the VAT's extensive volunteer hours.

## Fair fares

VAT asks for a very reasonable \$3 fee each way, and for that \$3, multiple stops are permitted. That's comparable to the amount charged by Knox Area Transit paratransit and CAC Transit. And, if the passenger has trouble paying that amount, VAT provides a workaround. The program asks if fare assistance is needed on its passenger application, and they do ask what the passenger's monthly income is. However, this is an honor system system – they don't verify the provided information, or request "yards of proof". With that information, they categorize the rider as "sliding scale", which basically means the rider will give VAT "something" when they have it, or "no fare", which means VAT won't bother charging at all. "However, we do continue to invoice every month and detail the number of trips," said Secrest. "If you are able to contribute towards these rides, then great. It's really kind of wild – sometimes we'll get a \$50 check out of the blue from a family member of somebody who's been unable to pay."

Unlike Metro's AccessRide system in Davidson County and several other paratransit services, VAT will take its clients beyond the county limits if necessary; however, they won't cross the state line. "We will go –within reason – anywhere the rider would like to go," said Secrest. "The bottom line is: if we can find a volunteer,

Continued on page 3

# Volunteer Assisted Transportation



Continued from page 2

and if we have a vehicle available - which we typically do - we can handle the request."

## The volunteer state

VAT has about 40 "active" volunteers. An "active" volunteer does a minimum of two half days a month, though there's a wide range of driver volunteer commitments. One dedicated volunteer drives four days a week, and on the other days she's delivering Mobile Meals! Some stay out for eight to ten hours a day, carrying three or four

customers. VAT also depends on part-timers, who are only available at certain times on certain days, and sometimes professional people are tapped who work during the week, but have time in the evenings or on the weekends. "That allows us a certain amount of flexibility in scheduling," Secret said. "It definitely helps with weekend shoppers and church-goers."

To accomplish all this, VAT has a staff of three paid positions: Secret and two "program specialists", Mack Van Dyke and Nancy Welch. Welch is the volunteer coordinator, does a lot of the administrative tasks and handles trip requests. Van Dyke also handles trip requests and takes care of the vehicle-related stuff, like maintaining the fleet. One of them is always on call on the weekends or in the evenings.

## The notion is "on the map"

According to Secret, there are volunteer driver programs all over, but generally, these initiatives are happening around a congregation, "where members kind of take care of their own," said Secret. "There are people out there doing this out of the goodness of their hearts, but not in an organized fashion. That

would require 'identifying the need', but I'm not sure how anybody could miss it!"

VAT is not interested in keeping its concept a secret. It would love to spread the word - which explains this article for sure, and Secret's willingness to give presentations to other communities on starting a similar program, or give technical assistance by email or by phone. Not too long ago, VAT was invited to address a quarterly meeting of the TN Commission on Aging and Disability, and will do a presentation at the Annual Partners Reunion Conference this coming March.

VAT recently received some national recognition too, with an achievement award from the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging. Also, the Beverly Foundation (which keeps an eye on all the supplemental transportation initiatives around the



**VAT is not interested in keeping its concept a secret. It would love to spread the word.**



country) gave VAT an "honorable mention" at their annual awards this year.

Staff from the Blount County Community Action Agency Office on Aging visited VAT about two years ago during their process of developing a volunteer program. While there weren't funds available to purchase vehicles, the program developed a different model utilizing volunteer drivers who are willing to use their personal cars.

On October 1, the Blount County Office on Aging launched SMiles, which stands for Senior Miles. It provides door-through-door transportation for those over 60 who do not drive. SMiles is a membership program; seniors pay a yearly fee, and then pre-pay for a designated number of round-trip rides.

Continued on page 5

# RECOGNIZING THE VALUE OF INTERNSHIPS IN SUCCESSFUL JOB PLACEMENT

by Karen Carothers, Yovancha Lewis-Brown  
and Staff at TRC Smyrna

The purpose of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program is to assist individuals with disabilities to go to work and the VR program in Tennessee uses every method and avenue available to increase the employment outcomes for its citizens. In addition to services like evaluation, training, vocational counseling and guidance, the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services has found that “live work” opportunities, also known as internships, have not only provided hands-on experience but also assisted individuals in transitioning from training to employment.

Finding a job can be a challenge for anyone, and if you are an individual with a disability who has little or no work experience the challenge is even greater. Internships not only give the individual an opportunity to apply the skills they’ve gained in the classroom, they also give potential employers the opportunity to see how well the individuals perform before offering the chance at permanent employment. While employers who participate in the internship program believe they are helping to educate individuals with disabilities, they

find they have actually opened their doors to an excellent pool of job seekers that can fill positions within their companies.



Photos by Nancy Patterson

The staff at the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center at Smyrna (TRC), a comprehensive training center operated by the Vocational

Rehabilitation Program, has realized the benefit of internships in the successful placement into integrated competitive employment in the community. While enrolled at TRC, students go through different internships in order to learn the expectations of employers and to familiarize them with the world of work.

The story below describes how VR services led to successful employment for one young lady. Through the individualized services provided by her VR Counselor and TRC staff partnering with DHS to provide an internship opportunity, she was able to begin her first job, and receive assistance in locating her first apartment, money management and transportation.

## HALEY’S STORY

At age 19, Haley was referred to TRC by her VR counselor in Hawkins County. Soon after her graduation from Volunteer High School in the rural area of Church Hill, she traveled a considerable distance to complete a vocational evaluation at TRC-Smyrna. She lived with her parents in East Tennessee and near to her one older sister – a location she fully anticipated returning to after graduation from TRC. Haley was enrolled and began attending the Business Education program at TRC in October, 2012. Although all students at TRC possess some degree of disability, Haley demonstrated she was up to the task and quickly earned the respect of her teachers. She persevered with a full expectation that she would



**Not only did Haley do well in her training, she was quickly accepted and appreciated by the office members at her internship.**



complete her training in good stead.

Not only did Haley do well in her training, she was quickly accepted and appreciated by her peers at her internship.

Continued on page 5

**HALEY'S STORY**

Continued from page 4

In early spring 2013, Haley began working her internship in the Office of Learning and Professional Development at the Tennessee Department of Human Services in Nashville. It was not long before she was approached about the possibility of full-time employment. Haley directed herself through the application process and interview, and landed a job offer in the same office where she interned. However, the decision to accept the job was not easy for Haley, because she had no family in the area, no place to live and was not accustomed to living and working in a large city.

To support Haley's desire to make this career move a reality, her office supervisor took her under her wing to help her navigate the sometimes confusing and uncertain times of job applications and offers. Her instructor, program manager and other involved persons - an entire team! - from TRC collaborated to formulate a realistic solution to make this job a real option for Haley. The team identified what the specific needs were: affordable housing, transportation, financial management, time management and self-confidence. Even though Haley had proven to be a very strong lady to this point, the prospect of all that was being undertaken was overwhelming at times.

TRC allowed Haley to move from its dormitory to the Transitional Living Services apartments where she could become more accustomed to apartment living. Staff took Haley to visit apartment living options off campus and discussed rental costs in light of her proposed salary. She completed several hours of financial planning to create a budget and to understand what those budget needs would be. She opened her very first checking account, established direct deposit and learned how to use a debit card. Although she had a driver's license, her family had to secure and deliver a vehicle to her in Smyrna.

Haley's family made many trips to middle Tennessee to help her get situated in her new lifestyle. Driving downtown seemed too daunting a task to Haley, so she opted to learn the MTA bus route with help from staff, and was eligible for free bus fares for state employees in Nashville and surrounding counties. Haley eventually found the perfect housing option in Murfreesboro and became well settled into her new life as a working woman when she celebrated her 20th birthday.



“ TRC allowed Haley to move from its dormitory to the Transitional Living Services apartments where she could become more accustomed to apartment living. ”

For more information regarding transition services through the VR program, visit the Vocational Rehabilitation Program website at <http://www.tn.gov/humanserv/rehab/vrs.html>.

**Volunteer Assisted Transportation**

Continued from page 3

“So people are thinking about these kinds of programs, and trying to develop them,” said Secrest. “Each of them will be different depending on the resources in the community. The notion is on the map; transportation always rises to the top five issues whenever you conduct a needs assessment for seniors or people with disabilities.”

For more info about how VAT operates, please contact Warren Secrest by phone at 865.673.5001, or by email at [warren.secrest@cactrans.org](mailto:warren.secrest@cactrans.org).

# Towards a LEANer Government

by Lynette Porter

As a part of Governor Haslam’s Customer Focused Government initiative, state agencies have been using process improvement tools and principles called LEAN in order to build an underlying culture in Tennessee State government that focuses on maximizing value to the customer. LEAN is a philosophy and a set of tools which help agencies focus on their business processes to maximize the customer experience while minimizing roadblocks to the processes. It is a proven methodology which a number of states and other governments have used to break through barriers and cut through bureaucracy. Using specific tools, trained LEAN facilitators are able to guide agencies through the steps of barrier elimination in order to redesign processes to focus on the value for the customer.

In July 2013, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) of the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) convened what is known as a LEAN Event. The purpose was to review the VR referral, intake, eligibility and Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) processes. Through this LEAN Event, VR and partner agencies looked for opportunities to improve the process for their customers – individuals with disabilities seeking employment.

LEAN engages the creativity of every employee, not just leadership at an agency. The VR team was made up of employees involved in every step of the processes being reviewed. Key to the VR event, partner agencies involved in the VR process and individuals who participated in the VR employment process were also represented on the team. The executive sponsor of the VR LEAN Event was DHS Assistant Commissioner

Cherrell Campbell-Street. She, along with executives from other key stakeholder agencies, came to a briefing at the end of each day of the Event to review the activities and recommendations that the LEAN team was designing. This ensured that executive-level approval was a part of the process as it developed over the three days.



**LEAN Team Members: BACK ROW – Kyle Cruze (Park Center), Todd Meise (Prospect Inc.), James Lauderdale (Nashville VR Counselor), Karen Curry (Metro Nashville Public Schools), Sue Karber (Dept of Mental Health/ Substance Abuse, LEAN Facilitator), Mike Sass (UT-CLEE); FRONT ROW – Kevin Walker (DHS, LEAN Facilitator), Sharyn Hancock (Career Centers, Clarksville), Nichole Garrett (East TN VR Unit Supervisor), Loria Richardson (The Arc TN, parent), Lynette Porter (Council on Developmental Disabilities, parent), Ruth Brock (LEAN Team Leader, VR Coordinator for Supported Employment), Emily Passino ( Dept. of Finance and Administration, LEAN Facilitator)**

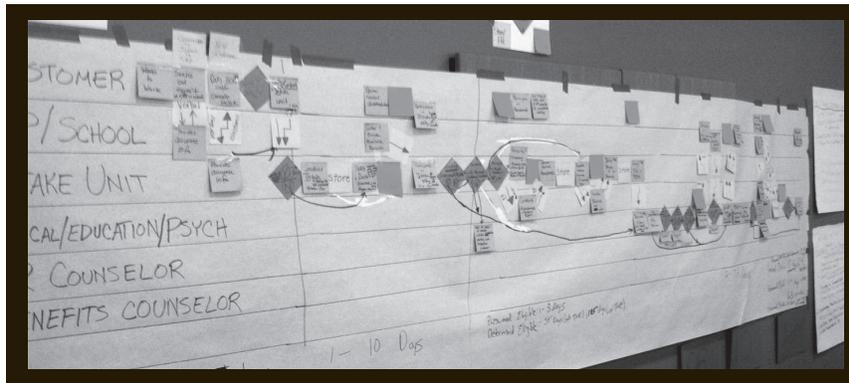
The specific task of the VR LEAN team was to clarify, improve and standardize the state’s VR process from initial customer contact through the development of the IPE for all stakeholders so that the customer receives timely and appropriate access to services. With LEAN, this is achieved through a mapping process. First, the current business process is mapped out in a very

Continued on page 7

## Towards a LEANer Government

Continued from page 6

detailed fashion. It is done through the eyes of the customer – the path a customer takes in a typical process from initial contact to completion. It helps the team to visually identify roadblocks, bottlenecks and duplicate tasks in the process.



When each step of the process is mapped out it becomes clear where the time delays and roadblocks are in the system. One example might be how many times an application changes hands or how long a person spends waiting for information to be gathered.

Often, systemic barriers can be eliminated immediately. For example, in the case of the VR LEAN Event, an issue in the computer system used for the intake process was addressed and 24 hours of wait time for one set of customers was eliminated immediately. That's the beauty of the LEAN process!

After the current process is mapped out, the team asks deliberate questions for each step on the map. Is value added here? Why do we do this? How can we reduce wait times? Can this be simplified? The team then begins to rebuild the process map, eliminating barriers, roadblocks and wait time. By the end of the mapping process, the team has rebuilt the process with a focus on the customer.

As a final step to the LEAN Event, the team develops an implementation plan with detailed recommendations and action steps, including timelines and responsibilities for each task that needs to be completed. On the

4th day of the LEAN Event, this implementation plan is presented to stakeholders affected by the process along with opportunity for questions and dialog.

What happens after the LEAN Event? The work of the team does not stop. The LEAN team comes back together every 30 days to report on the progress of each part of the implementation plan and to discuss any barriers or changes to the action plan. The work continues over the next year to solidify the new, customer-focused process. Kevin Walker, LEAN Facilitator with the Department of Human Services, sums the event up perfectly. "The LEAN Event did not complete our work, but served as a launching for further collaboration and partnership to improve the VR intake, referral, eligibility and planning process. Through our work together we will provide more efficient and timely services for customers with disabilities who seek the joy and freedom of employment."

## Meet Our New Council Member: **Bob Plummer**



Robert "Bob" Plummer is representing the First Development District. Executive director of the East Tennessee State University National Alumni Association, Plummer is an associate vice president for university advancement where he has been employed for 27 years,

and where he earned a BS and MEd.

He has served as a volunteer and in leadership roles with several governmental and community organizations including the Salvation Army, local emergency medical services, and parks and recreation. He has been a passionate advocate for his son who has experienced learning and developmental challenges. Bob, his wife Carol and son Jacob reside in Johnson City.

# Uncovering New Pathways to Employment through Community Conversations

by Sarah Harvey and Erik W. Carter

A great job can be an important aspect of living a good life. Yet, meaningful work that brings real pay and strong community connections remains elusive for far too many young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Tennessee. Since 2005, the employment rate for Tennesseans with disabilities has steadily declined and recent data indicate fewer than 17% of people with cognitive disabilities in the state are working (Butterworth et al., 2012). Substantially changing the employment landscape for young people with disabilities in our state will require us to rethink “business as usual” and to identify new pathways for increasing access to meaningful work. But what are the most pressing barriers standing in our way, and what are the promising directions for making change?



Photos by TNWorks Staff

employment opportunities in local areas. These events are designed as engaging ways of gathering diverse members of a community to generate both ordinary and creative solutions to a key challenge facing their city or county: the limited access people with disabilities have to real work for real pay.



The TennesseeWorks Partnership is a federally funded Project of National Significance charged with spurring systems change and building greater capacity and commitment for supporting competitive employment. One thrust of our efforts during this first year of the five-year project has been to host a series of “community conversations” focused on uncovering the most promising avenues for expanding meaningful

Since June, six community conversations have been held across the state, in Chattanooga, Greeneville, Jackson, Lawrence County, Memphis and Murfreesboro. Each event was organized by a local planning team in collaboration with members of the TennesseeWorks Partnership. Collectively, these teams included people with disabilities, parents, educators, disability agency representatives, civic leaders and other citizens. Each team suggested locations for their event and helped extend invitations broadly throughout the community. One critical feature of these conversations is that they intentionally include both professionals and non-professional community members to ensure both new and familiar perspectives are heard. Too often, discussions about systems change only involve people working within the very systems in need of transformation. Engaging a broader range of voices ensures the many assets existing within every community do not get overlooked.

Continued on page 9

## Uncovering New Pathways to Employment through **Community Conversations**

Continued from page 8

Each two-hour community conversation was held in the evening over coffee and desserts. The broad cross-section of each community who attended was asked to share their perspectives on the resources, supports, programs and opportunities in their community that could be drawn upon to expand employment opportunities for young people with disabilities. Using an adaptation of the World Café conversation process ([www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)), we asked attendees to participate in a series of “coffee-house-style” conversations at small tables during which they shared their own ideas related to two questions:

- **What can we do as a community to increase meaningful employment opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities?**
- **How might we work together in compelling ways to make these ideas happen here in this community?**

Throughout each event, facilitators sitting at each table recorded the numerous ideas shared by event participants. One person might share a compelling idea for addressing transportation barriers, another might suggest ways to dispel myths about people with disabilities in the workplace, and a third might recommend ways that schools could strengthen the employment preparation they provide students. As new ideas are generated, others sitting at the same table react to, build upon and refine their suggestions. Throughout any event, hundreds of ideas might be voiced. Toward the end of the evening, the entire group engages in a short time of sharing out the most promising ideas they heard throughout the evening for making meaningful change.

For the TennesseeWorks Partnership, a primary purpose of these six events has been to learn about the challenges and possibilities related to connecting young people with disabilities to competitive employment in the many diverse communities that make up our state. We have collected the notes

taken at each event and have begun developing a series of short briefs providing an overview of each conversation. These briefs can be downloaded at [www.tennesseeworks.org](http://www.tennesseeworks.org). Later this year, we will craft a comprehensive “good practice” guide compiling all of the excellent ideas shared across these events. This guide can be used by educators, families, civic leaders, policy makers and many others to illustrate the many practical steps we can collectively take to radically change the employment landscape for Tennesseans with disabilities.

What are people saying about these events? Tommy Lee Kidd, who served as the host of the Lawrence County conversation, reflects on his experience in the article on page 10. Others have also spoken powerfully about the impact of these events. At the end of each community conversation, we asked everyone who attended to share their perspectives on an anonymous survey. After reviewing findings from the almost 400 Tennesseans who attended these six events, we are encouraged by the possibilities these conversations have spurred. Nearly everyone considered the evening to be a valuable investment of their time, many learned about local resources and supports that they had never heard about, most identified steps they could take to help expand access to employment, and almost everyone felt the evening improved their views of the capacity of their community to improve employment opportunities locally.

The TennesseeWorks Partnership is committed to expanding the opportunities young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have to contribute their skills within the workplace. We need to make sure we have businesses willing to hire people with disabilities; make sure supports are in place on the job, at home and at school that can help young people find and keep their jobs; and make sure high expectations related to employment are shared with young people from every direction.

We are certain our state has the capacity to transform the employment rates mentioned at the outset of this article. We invite you to partner with us as we work together to support people with disabilities in living a good life in community.

# Calling the Community Together in Lawrenceburg to Talk About Employment

by Tommy Lee Kidd

Originally, the Vandy folks called and asked if Lawrence County would be interested in holding a TennesseeWorks meeting. Without even consulting my best and closest advisor (my wife, Lesa), I immediately said, "Shoot yea, we'll do that". But when I told Lesa, the reality sunk in: if this was going to be a success, we had to take ownership in this project and we had a huge task ahead of us.

Lesla and I very carefully chose our planning committee of well-respected people in the community. These folks also served as our table hosts the evening of the event. They included the city mayor, the Chamber of Commerce director, a vice president from our local bank, a county commissioner, an associate pastor, a high school vice principal, and so forth.

We also very carefully - and strategically - composed a targeted list of people to personally invite to this happening, rather than advertise it to the public. While I think meetings with only attendees that work in the field of disability can be great, Lesa and I wanted this to have the potential to get a message across to some folks who could actually hire people with disabilities, and make community decisions to make hiring easier.

So, using Lesa's beauty shop connections and all of our small town knowledge, we set out to get as many key employers there in our county as we could. To that end, we had the WalMart store manager; Walgreens store manager; Kroger assistant store manager; Save-A-Lot food stores regional manager; GoodWill Career Center director; Edwards Oil Company owner (owns all the Quick Mart Stores in the region); McDonald's owner (owns seven restaurants in the region); Wendy's owner; True Value Hardware Owner; Legends Steak House owner; hospital CEO; Modine Manufacturing CEO; county executive; county commissioners; city mayor; city council; director of schools; central office special education staff; school board members; and on and on...

The meeting took place at a fabulous facility on our square called Providence Hall. Our good friend Jeanette Perkins is the manager of Providence Hall and does all of the catering for the events there. So, Lesa and I were able to negotiate an

amazing price for the food and the whole shebang. We had pies, cakes, you name it.... Jeanette did a fantastic job!

Oh my goodness, what a spectacular night for Lawrence County it turned out to be! Lesa and I were in total disbelief and shock as to the attendance at the Lawrence County Community Conversation meeting. The only explanation we have is that this was truly an act of God. Lesa thought about 50% of the people we invited would show up and I was leaning toward 70%.

Oh ye of little faith....

Lesla and I called almost everyone that attended the meeting personally, and invited them to the event. We got their cell numbers and I made a group in my phone of all the numbers we could get. I sent text reminders to everyone too.

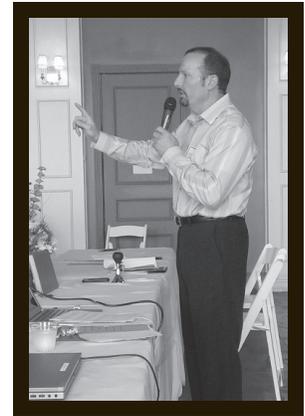
It got close to 5:30 that evening and they began arriving.....and they all came.....all 95 people to a two-hour meeting.....unbelievable! I hugged more people that night than I've hugged in a long, long time!

We had table hosts at each table (ten tables with about nine people per table) that led the discussion and took notes. The table hosts didn't change tables between discussion rounds but everyone else did. We had three discussion rounds. I facilitated the meeting with Kennedy Center staff from Vanderbilt giving instructions as to the procedures of the evening.

The positive interaction amongst everyone during the table discussions was truly wonderful to see. Everyone was engaged and involved. I heard the following comment from several folks: "my eyes were opened tonight to something that I had no idea about."

There were many great ideas of how everyone from all areas of the community can work together to employ people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Both our cell phones were lit up until very late with positive messages about what had just occurred.

Amen!



# FUN FOR EVERYONE!

## Social Inclusive Networking Connections

**Cynthia R. Chambers, PhD**

Ever had a group of people that you said, "I sure do like hanging out with them!?" In the East Tennessee Tri-Cities area, a group of individuals with and without disabilities said that exact statement. With a vision in mind, Drew Shortt, a middle school teacher in Washington County, created Social Inclusive Networking Connections (INC) in collaboration with East Tennessee State University (ETSU) and families of individuals with varying disabilities. "I kept hearing parents say that they needed a social outlet for their kids and their families," said Shortt. "Together with parents like Amy Wenk and Susan Hiscutt, we envisioned Social INC and thought, what a fun way to fulfill this need in our community."

Social INC is a group designed to offer social and service opportunities for people with and without disabilities, which is a part of its mission. A major goal of Social INC is to provide age appropriate activities in which a social community can blossom. This inclusive program gives individuals of all abilities increased opportunities to meet new friends in a safe, welcoming environment. It is open to individuals of all age levels with some social activities specifically targeted for school-aged children or adults.

Social INC's social activities are casual, fun events and activities related to group interaction and recreation. For example, the group has participated in bowling, bounce houses, Fender's Farm, Olympic Day at ETSU, family race night at Volunteer Speedway, Speedway in Lights, whitewater rafting, Zumba, sign language classes, game night, and a variety of large group festivals. Through business partnerships, many of the above activities were offered at free or reduced pricing.

Community-based events and activities related to



Jack and Kyle Killman  
rafting the Nolichucky  
River with Social INC.

Photo by Cheryl Killman

service and philanthropy are also provided in Social INC. These are hands-on projects that aim to give back to our neighbors or others in far off lands, like writing to the troops overseas, supporting children in need during the holidays, and shopping for and packing buckets for Liberia. Social INC has adopted the idea that we, as a group, want to be actively involved in change in our community, rather than just passive recipients of services.

Social INC is maintained by a key group of people who keep the activities organized and implemented. However, it's important to note that the success of this group is because its participants value the connections that are being made across each event and see Social INC as an enriching piece of their lives. "Social INC has provided for my son and family the opportunity to participate in many activities that we otherwise might not be involved in, and to share them with other families with similarities," said Shannon Fauver. "Our children are able to be themselves and enjoy their experiences without the pressures of fitting in. What a blessing this program is! We are always looking forward to the next adventure!"

Because Social INC strives to be inclusive of individuals of all abilities and backgrounds, the diversity of its participants adds a unique quality to this group. When a person comes to a Social INC activity or event, they are assured to be accepted in a welcoming environment. Social INC participants are greeted like long lost friends, or as some have said, "like family".

Continued on page 17

# The Creation of Tennessee's Employment First Task Force



by Emma Shouse

This past summer, Governor Bill Haslam signed an Executive Order entitled "An Order Establishing the Tennessee Employment First Initiative to Expand Community Employment Opportunities for Tennesseans with Disabilities." This order called for the formation of an Employment First Task Force, convened by the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD). It involves a coalition of state agencies and key stakeholders including the departments of Labor and Workforce Development, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Education, Human Services, the Bureau of TennCare, the Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, the Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee, The Arc Tennessee and the University of Tennessee Center for Literacy, Education and Employment. The group also includes family members, individuals with disabilities and an agency currently providing employment supports for their clients. The task force meets every other month and subcommittees targeting specific issues convene in the months in between the larger meetings.

The Employment First Task Force has begun to examine purposefully and strategically what state services and systems touch a person's life from the time they are diagnosed with a disability to the time they reach an age ready for employment, and how an individual transitions from one set of services to another (for example, from the school system to adult services). The task force has mapped where there are currently gaps in the service system, researched what roles each department plays and how departments might take on new roles, and devised possible strategies for blending funding sources from various agencies to provide employment supports for individuals with disabilities. By next summer, the task force will present Governor Haslam with a comprehensive report of their findings and proposals for expanding employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities.

The task force has defined their purpose as: 1) creating an easier flow of all services related to preparing for,

finding and maintaining employment; 2) identifying barriers preventing people with disabilities who wish to work from having jobs in the community; and 3) identifying solutions to these barriers that can be implemented at the state, community and, in some instances, individual/family level. They defined success for the "customer" (a person with a disability currently receiving or waiting to receive state services related to employment) as achieving "integrated, self-sufficient, competitive wage employment that meets their desires and passions".

Thus far, the task force has identified a number of barriers that should be addressed to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities: a need for training on best practices for professionals helping people with disabilities find and maintain employment; the number of individuals currently on the waiting list for DIDD and Vocational Rehabilitation Services due to limited funding; the misperception among some individuals with disabilities and/or families that employment will automatically mean the loss of benefits like SSI/SSDI; and a need for restructuring parts of the service system to incentivize community providers to offer integrated and competitive employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities rather than facility-based work. The task force is generating action plans and proposed solutions for all these barriers and more.

"Governor Haslam's leadership in signing this Executive Order is unprecedented," said Wanda Willis, executive director of the Council on Developmental Disabilities. "Never before has the state taken such a progressive and significant step to prioritize employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

"The individuals appointed to the Employment First Task Force have shown a marked dedication to having open and honest conversations about the strengths and weaknesses of the current employment service system," continued Willis. "We have some really wonderful participants on this task force who are committed to

Continued on page 17

## 2013-14 Partners in Policymaking Class

by Ned Andrew Solomon

Vilma Cueva was hoping to become a “voice” for children with disabilities, to help them become more independent, successful and happy citizens of Tennessee. Penny Daniel wanted to develop the skills to establish her own autism spectrum disorder disability awareness group in Lincoln County. Tabitha Gatlin plans to learn how to advocate for necessary changes to state policies and practices. Roger Kostiw became the primary caregiver of his adult sister with a disability, and is striving to make sure he has the know-how to advocate for her needs and desires. Cyndi Lou Griffin joined to learn more about the legislative process. Stephanie Jones is determined to be actively involved in her community, and to use that involvement to educate others, and to build a stronger foundation for those with disabilities.

Continued on page 17



Roxanne Carreon, Madison  
Maureen Cook, Englewood  
Vilma Cueva, Spring Hill  
Penny Daniel, Fayetteville  
Rebecca Dyal, McKenzie  
Tabitha Gatlin, Lawrenceburg  
Carol Greiner, Fairview  
Cyndi Lou Griffin, Memphis  
Lynn Jackson, Memphis  
Christina Jones, Ashland City  
Stephanie Jones, Memphis  
Roger Kostiw, Nashville  
Dawn Leonard, Limestone  
Alicia McCann, Hohenwald  
Ashley Miller, Bartlett  
Yvonne Neubert, Knoxville  
Jason Oliver, Greeneville  
Joni Pinker, Knoxville  
L. A. Richmond, Memphis  
Jennifer Stambaugh, Knoxville  
Elizabeth Stivers, Spring Hill  
Pamela VanGilder, Germantown  
Larry Walls, Hermitage  
Hope Welch, White House

# Breaking Ground Interview with Charlotte Bryson

## Retiring Executive Director Tennessee Voices for Children

Breaking Ground had an opportunity to have a conversation with Charlotte Bryson, who recently retired from Tennessee Voices for Children after 18 years as its executive director. It has been an impressive two decades under her leadership. TVC has been the recipient of many national, state, and local awards including the "Making a Difference" award from the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health; the "Excellence in Communications and Community Outreach" award by the Center for Mental Health Services; the Frist Foundation's "Making a Difference Award of Achievement" by the Center for Nonprofit Management's Salute to Excellence; the "Heroes in the Fight" award by the Mental Health Association; the "International Heroes of Hope" award, and the Karl Dennis "Unconditional Care" award.



by Tipper Gore which founded TVC in the late '80s. TVC is now the state chapter for the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health and a family-run organization with a majority of the Board of Directors being parents of children with a Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED). At that time, Tennessee led the nation in the rate at which we placed children with serious emotional disturbances (SED) in out of state placements. Also children with SED could primarily only access either outpatient care or inpatient hospitalization. In hearings across the state held by TDMHDD the dilemma was compared to offering only an "aspirin or surgery" for any other health issue. Tipper Gore and TVC advocated for a better children's mental health system and better mental health insurance coverage for all the levels of care needed for children and to have parents as full partners in any decision making regarding their children.

**BG:** You have been executive director at Tennessee Voices for Children for 18 years, helping to advocate for children and families in Tennessee through a variety of TVC initiatives. Looking over that span of time, can you talk a bit about how issues have changed for children and families over the years, as well as what has remained the same? In other words, have the battles changed, or is it surprising how some barriers that existed before are still obstacles today?

**CB:** Before I became the ED at TVC in 1995, I was the Director of Children and Youth Services at the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities (TDMHDD) for about 10 years. During this time, I had also worked for several years with the small group of volunteers led

Today, we are seeing the mandates for a full array of services for children. Effective community-based systems of care and family-driven, youth-guided, culturally competent services, including wraparound services are being incorporated into state services and health insurance coverage. The goal to keep children with SED in their communities, in their schools and in their homes is being realized in the system of care sites and other programs across the country.

Interestingly, though, we seem to be back with the question of payment for these effective services including the following: community-based,

Continued on page 15

## Interview with Charlotte Bryson

Retiring Executive Director

Tennessee Voices for Children

Continued from page 14

wraparound, in home, parent and peer support services. Will Medicaid and health insurance reimbursements be sufficient to allow these already very cost-effective services to continue? This is a continuing challenge.

**BG:** What is it about the work of TVC that made it possible for you to stay with this agency for 20 years?

**CB:** The work at TVC is about providing advocacy and support to children with mental health challenges and their families. The youth and their families know what works for them and what does not work for them. We only need to listen to them. At TVC we have served over 100,000 children, families and professionals every year. As advocates we try to change the service delivery system to better meet their needs. TVC took the lead in promoting the use of a coordinated system of care in Tennessee that included family support and community engagement as key components. TVC worked collaboratively with all the key stakeholders to promote the transformation of the children's mental health system. While there are daily challenges at a family-run organization like TVC, we feel that a bad day working as an advocate is better than a good day anywhere else. I have loved every day that I have worked for TVC. There is just nothing that I would rather have been doing!

**BG:** What are some of your proudest achievements as ED, or perhaps, better stated, what TVC accomplishments are you most proud of that happened during your term as ED?

**CB:** There are numerous achievements and accomplishments at TVC for which I am very proud. TVC and Tipper Gove gave input into the development of health care reform to the Clinton Administration which moved toward better coverage

of a full array of services for children with mental health challenges. TVC became the state chapter for the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. TVC successfully advocated for the development of the first Children's Cabinet to help coordinate services through all the child-serving state agencies. TVC was among the stakeholders who advocated for the establishment of the Council on Children's Mental Health to establish systems of care for children with SED throughout Tennessee. TVC was instrumental in writing the first System of Care SAMHSA applications and has been a partner in all five systems of care grants in Tennessee. TVC held the first Children's Mental Health Week Celebration for public awareness of children's mental health issues in 1997 and has continued and expanded this celebration every year since. TVC has produced outstanding, powerful conferences on the State of the Child every other year. Also TVC became the state chapter for Youth Move and established youth councils across the state. Families and youth alike have a voice in their own services as well as policy development due to the support at TVC.

**BG:** The readership of this publication is most interested in issues related to developmental disabilities. How many of your accomplishments/initiatives affected families of children with disabilities – or were all of your successes accomplishments for ALL children?

**CB:** While most of our accomplishments have affected families of children with mental health challenges, many policies have made positive changes for all children too. Certainly our emphasis on prevention and early intervention has had a positive impact on all children. TVC's awareness campaigns on children's needs have been helpful to all parents as well as the emphasis on families being at the head of the table when any decisions are being made about their children.

**BG:** Knowing that TVC focuses on emotional and behavioral challenges, how has the seemingly ever-

Continued on page 16

## Interview with Charlotte Bryson

Retiring Executive Director

Tennessee Voices for Children

Continued from page 15

increasing ranks of families dealing with autism – and the challenging behaviors often associated with that disability - had an impact on the work you do?

**CB:** From the beginning of TVC, families with children on the autism spectrum have contacted us for information and referral, support and advocacy. These families underlined for us the need for individualized services, the need for a full array of effective services for children with unique needs. These parents have been excellent advocates and taught us the passion and persistence needed to make sure the system addresses their very real and critical needs; also the need for continued advocacy to make sure that the services the children need are included in health care reform and covered by health insurance plans.

“ Many policies have made positive changes for all children too. ”

**BG:** What was your decision to step down based on – and what are your post-TVC plans?

**CB:** After about 50 years of working in the children’s mental health field, I am very pleased to see so many new advocates and leaders that are so passionate and skilled about transforming the children’s mental health system. At TVC we have the best Board of Directors possible and staff members that are extremely talented and ready to lead TVC. Just thinking about the energy and dedication I see out there on behalf of children and families makes me smile. My post TVC plans are pretty simple. I am going to complete some long overdue projects, vacation and travel and spend time with my three children and three grandchildren. Mainly I am not going to be answering hundreds of emails every day!

# SAVE THE DATE

## TENNESSEE EMPLOYMENT FIRST LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

A free training for self-advocates, 18 and older, who are interested in learning how to advocate for competitive, integrated employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Registration information will be available soon.

For more information, please contact Ned Andrew Solomon at 615.532.6556 or ned.solomon@tn.gov .

The Tennessee Employment First Leadership Academy is sponsored by the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) and the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation.



September 4-8, 2014

The Scarritt-Bennett  
Center

Nashville

## 2013-14 Partners in Policymaking Class

Continued from page 13

After recognizing and experiencing some of the challenges in acquiring services for her children, Elizabeth Stivers decided she had to be part of the solution. Larry Walls is trying to hone his passion for advocating for persons with disabilities, to lead to “real life changes”, and “real positive life outcomes”.

All different reasons for applying to the Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute, and all excellent ones. These individuals and 17 others were accepted into the 2013-14 Partners class. Almost immediately the class bonded, thanks to the program’s balance of informative sessions from experts in the disability field and interactive activities. It’s a driven group that can be deadly serious, but that also enjoys, and needs, a good hearty laugh from time to time. They learn from each other, and support one another in their individual journeys to make life better for themselves, for their loved ones, and for their community members.

Please join the Council on Developmental Disabilities in welcoming the newest participants in the Council’s 20-year-old leadership and advocacy training program!

For more information about the Partners training, or to get an application for the 2014-15 Partners class, please contact Ned Andrew Solomon at [ned.solomon@tn.gov](mailto:ned.solomon@tn.gov), or by phone at 615.532.6566. The training is free, and open to adults with disabilities and family members of persons with disabilities.

The application deadline for the next class is April 30, 2014.

## FUN FOR EVERYONE!

Continued from page 11

This initiative has also been a source of positive, inclusive experiences for future special educators and other university students. Many university students



Ciera Poland, Drew Shortt, Melissa Jordan and Catherine Miller at Bristol Motor Speedway.

participate in Social INC for their own social engagement, while others may use the activities and events as service learning opportunities. “As a future teacher, I learned that recreation and expanding social spheres are one of the difficulties not being

addressed through school systems,” said Tei Takenaka, a recent graduate of the ETSU Special Education program. “[Social INC] was also a great opportunity to put my knowledge from college courses into practice.”

New activities and events are constantly being developed for this evolving program. This upcoming year, Social INC is partnering with Leaping Lizards Family Indoor Fun to offer a Chameleon Kids Night. This recurring event will offer inclusive nights at the inflatable center located in Kingsport. There will also be a free Fall Festival in Bristol and a free Appalachian Experience event in Unicoi coordinated by ETSU Special Education course participants.

Stay tuned to Social INC’s Facebook page [www.facebook.com/SocialINCTN](http://www.facebook.com/SocialINCTN) for more information!

## The Creation of Tennessee’s Employment First Task Force Continued from page 12

working together to solve challenging problems, being open-minded about new creative solutions, and always maintaining the perspective of an individual with disabilities encountering these services.”

Advocates for meaningful community employment opportunities for people with disabilities should be encouraged by recent developments in our state. In addition to the Employment First executive order and

the creation of the task force, three federal employment grants have been awarded in the past couple of years to the TN Department of Labor, DIDD, and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. More people than ever before are intensely committed to and focused on changing the employment landscape for Tennesseans with disabilities. To learn more about the Tennessee employment initiatives, contact Emma Shouse at the Council office at 615-253-5368 or [emma.shouse@tn.gov](mailto:emma.shouse@tn.gov).

## Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities

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

Return service requested

### MEMBERSHIP AND STAFF

#### COUNCIL CHAIRPERSONS

Stephanie Brewer Cook, Chair  
Roger D. Gibbens, Vice Chair

#### COUNCIL MEMBERS

Sheri Anderson, Murfreesboro  
Norris L. Branick, Jackson  
Cynthia R. Chambers, Jonesborough  
Tonya Copeland, Brentwood  
Rick Davis, Hixson  
Evan Espey, Antioch  
Tommy Lee Kidd, Lawrenceburg  
Diane T. (Sandi) Klink, Memphis  
Renee M. Lopez, Gallatin  
William Lovell, Hohenwald  
Bob Plummer, Johnson City  
Debbie Riffle, Humboldt  
Elizabeth Ann Ritchie, Knoxville  
Steven Sheegog, Memphis  
Phil Stevens, Brentwood

#### STATE AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES

Cherrell Campbell-Street, Department of  
Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation  
Services  
Joey Hassell, Department of Education,  
Division of Special Populations  
Debbie Payne, Department of Intellectual and  
Developmental Disabilities  
Ralph Perrey, Tennessee Housing Development  
Agency  
E. Douglas Varney, Department of Mental  
Health  
Richard Kennedy, Commission on Children  
and Youth  
Jim Shulman, Commission on Aging  
and Disability  
Michael D. Warren, Department of Health,  
Division of Maternal and Child Health  
Patti Killingsworth, Bureau of TennCare

#### UNIVERSITY CENTERS FOR EXCELLENCE REPRESENTATIVES

Frederick Palmer, University of Tennessee  
Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities  
Elisabeth Dykens and  
Elise McMillan, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for  
Research on Human Development

#### PROTECTION & ADVOCACY

Lisa Primm, Disability Law & Advocacy Center  
of Tennessee

#### COUNCIL STAFF

Wanda Willis, Executive Director  
Mildred Sparkman, Administrative Secretary  
Alicia Cone, Director of Grant Program  
Lynette Porter, Deputy Director  
Ned Andrew Solomon, Director of Partners in  
Policymaking™ Leadership Institute  
JoEllen Fowler, Administrative Assistant  
Emma Shouse, Director of Public Information  
Tiffany Mason, Public Policy Director