Breaking Ground issue 100 – Special Arts Issue 2019-2020

Cover image description: Seven tall and thin stylized black human figures in colorful outfits are shown dancing and in different poses against a bright pink and orange abstract background. The figures are simply drawn, with no real features, just images of bodies dancing. Included at the bottom of the cover are logos for the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Tennessee Arts Commission, and Borderless Arts Tennessee.

Cover image information from the front inside cover: “Dancers” by Laura Hudson. Artist bio: Laura Hudson of Nashville uses vivid colors and markers and fills lush, natural settings with beautiful flowers, colorful birds, and a variety of large and small creatures. She said, “Art helps me calm down and have fun.”

Footer information on inside front cover:

Learn more about the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

615.532.6615

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# Introductions

## Introduction letter by Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities

Throughout history, art has offered a way for humans to tell our stories and express the deepest and truest things about our lives, feelings, and experiences in ways that rise above simple facts and information. Art can be an especially meaningful and effective outlet for those pushed to the edges of our society, whose voices are less often heard, and whose experiences are least understood. Through art, we can connect with those whose voices we most need to hear.

This is our 100th issue of Breaking Ground. It is fitting that this milestone arrives with our annual arts issue. I look forward to the arts issue every year. In these pages, we celebrate the remarkable, beautiful, and sometimes heart-breaking self-expression of Tennesseans with disabilities.

I am personally moved to see artwork in this issue from someone dear to my heart. We grieved with Council member Karen West this past year, when she lost her daughter, Tabitha. Tabitha brought joy to so many during her short life. Tabitha did not communicate with speech, but her art gave us a window into her inner world. It’s no surprise to anyone who knew her that those glimpses are stunningly beautiful.

I hope you enjoy this 100th issue of Breaking Ground as much as we have enjoyed getting it ready for you.

Wanda Willis, Executive Director.

Article includes a headshot of Wanda Willis.

## Introduction letter by Tennessee Arts Commission

The Tennessee Arts Commission is once again honored to co-sponsor the Council’s annual Breaking Ground Arts Issue. During this past year, we have brought arts programs to older adults, rural communities, people serving in the military, veterans and their families, and the homeless. Many people within these groups are living with disabilities.

To reach people who have limited access to the arts, the Tennessee Arts Commission, in partnership with the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability, received a $1 million grant. The grant is through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Tennessee Health Department. The grant is to provide the Tennessee Person-Centered Music Program to more than 2,200 nursing home residents, including those living with dementia and Alzheimer’s. The goal of the program is to use music to reduce medication use and negative behaviors while improving health and quality of life.

Nursing homes throughout Tennessee can learn more about the program and how to participate by contacting the Project Director, Quiteka Moten, at Quiteka.Moten@tn.gov, 615-532-1834, or visiting tnpersoncenteredmusic.org.

The Tennessee Arts Commission is proud to work with partners like the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and Borderless Arts Tennessee to ensure that all people have the chance to engage in the arts. For more information about the Tennessee Arts Commission, visit our website at tnartscommission.org.

Kim Johnson, Director of Arts Access, TN Arts Commission

Article includes headshot of Kim.

## Introduction letter by Borderless Arts Tennessee

Borderless Arts Tennessee has been honored to partner with the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities throughout the years to enhance inclusion for people with disabilities. We are proud of the progress that has been made by working together on projects like webinars, professional development certifications, and conversations on breaking down barriers. The Breaking Ground Arts Issue is just one more opportunity for exposure and awareness. Borderless Arts TN is proud to be a partner in such a worthy effort.

Lori Kissinger, Executive Director, Borderless Arts Tennessee

Article includes headshot of Lori.

# Fine Art Collection 1

“2 Nuzzling Horses in Iceland” by Houston Vandergriff.

The photo shows two brown beautiful horses in a green meadow on a cloudy day nuzzling one another’s necks and manes.

*Photographer Houston Vandergriff has Down syndrome and lives in Powell, Tennessee, but is a globetrotter who has traveled to 47 states and 22 countries. He loves to share his unique way of seeing the world through his gift of photography.*

## “Wild Blue Yonder” by Christy Earheart

A sunny, bright, watercolor painting of a blue sky and bright green grass and pale yellow sun. The painting is done in splotches, meant to look like a watercolor and not very realistic.

*Painter Christy Earheart, LMSW is a Quality Assurance Analyst with Greater Nashville Regional Council, a People to People Interviewer with The Arc Tennessee, and a Partners in Policymaking® graduate. She said, “Art is a means to re-energize after stress. This and growing plants are important hobbies I enjoy sharing with others.”*

## “Steven at St. George Island” by Jeff Harden

A close-up photo of a man with Down syndrome wearing a fisherman’s hat. He is at the beach, near the edge of the water, and the photo shows him on a sunny, windy day with the shadow of the photographer on the sand behind him.

*Jeff Harden lives in Cleveland, Tennessee, and is the father of an adult son with a disability. In Jeff’s words, “I love to take photos of all the places we go, to have a picture to go along with the memory.”*

## “Watercolor Faces” by John L. Butts, Jr.

The painting shows parts of 4 faces; the faces are overlapping and appear to be two men and two women, with different complexions and hair colors. They are shown against a light purple watercolor background with lines, which looks almost like a spider web or clouds.

*John L. Butts, Jr. lives in Clarksville and attends the Centerstone Peer Support Center. He said, “Making art relaxes me and I feel calm.” John likes to draw faces of people of various cultures.*

“Life,” by Erika Jensen

A painting with swirling patterns of cool colors like blues and greens, reminiscent of the surface of a body of water like a pond, with white spots that look almost like bubbles.

*Erika Jensen is from Manchester and is a member of the Centerstone Peer Support Center in Tullahoma. Her picture, “Life,” is an acrylic pour painting; each color was mixed with a small amount of glue and water, then several colors are poured without mixing into a cup. The cup is allowed to flow over the canvas, then left alone to dry.*

## “Joyous Explosion,” by Debbie Hanson

A watercolor painting with watery blotches of all colors all over the canvas; it reminds a viewer of liquid on a slide under microscopes – round shapes all overlapping and all types of colors.

Debbie Hanson of Flintville enjoys trying new materials and techniques as she creates her artwork. Debbie helped set up an ongoing Healing Arts Project, Inc. art exhibit, which features art created by people in mental health and addiction recovery.

## “Untitled,” by Joey McNinch

The artwork is a black and white photo, what appears to be an extreme close up of a single eye. The eye is perhaps wearing makeup – you can see the eyelashes and iris of the eye, but the photo has a blurry and unreal quality to it.

Photographer Joey McNinch, age 14, has had several photographs published in “Breaking Ground.” Joey has autism and lives in Mount Juliet.

## “What Tom Saw, Peeking,” by Kathy Tupper

A painting that shows colorful and vibrant flowers of reds, pinks, yellows and blues cascading down the canvas in soft and blurry lines. The canvas is split into two pieces, with a thin strip on the left, a gap, and then the rest of the painting on the right – it looks like the view through a fence into a garden or through a window. The name of the painting and artist are at the bottom in blue flowery handwriting.

Multi-talented artist Kathy Tupper has more than 50 years’ experience in graphic design, illustration, and writing. She is also a watercolor design and techniques instructor.

## “Winter Beets,” by Nancy Olson

A painting of a bunch of four beets, which have green leaves at the top and a rich dark red for the body of the beet, against a light brown dirt-like background.

Nancy Olson lives in Murfreesboro and likes to paint watercolors with her art class at Our Place Peer Center. She said, “Creating art distracts my worries and I feel productive.” She reflects the time of harvest in rural farms with her painting, Winter Beets.

# Article 1: Andrew Braach: Traditional country singer by Ned Andrew Solomon, Director, Partners in Policymaking® Leadership Institute, Council on Developmental Disabilities

Image description: The photo of Andrew in this article is a black and white photo of a young man with light blond hair, a black button up shirt and jeans, and a cowboy hat. It looks like a professional headshot of a musician – he is leaning against a stone wall looking off to the left past the camera, smiling slightly and holding a guitar as though he is about to play.

Listening to Andrew Braach sing live, or on his first CD, Talkin’ to Ghosts, Volume 1, is like being transported back to another time. It’s a time when seminal country artists like Hank Williams, Sr., Merle Haggard, and Johnny Cash – three of Andrew’s all-time favorites – could slay you with just an acoustic guitar and some raw, poignant lyrics.

“I’ve been listening to older country music all my life,” said Andrew. “When I was a baby, my dad played Hank Williams, Sr. music for me, then later on I started listening to Johnny Cash and Kenny Rogers, and then not too long ago, I started listening to Hank Williams, Sr. again. ‘Folsom Prison Blues’ was my first recital song. I don’t know what it is about the older country music that I like so much, but I just like it.”

Whatever it is that drew Braach to traditional country music, it’s working for him. In a relatively short time, Andrew has been able to perform on numerous occasions, at various venues, sometimes even sharing the bill with more established artists. That takes a lot of self-confidence, which wasn’t always there.

“The first time I ever performed I couldn’t even look at the audience,” Andrew recalled. “I had to go somewhere they couldn’t see me. I sang from a side room. Now it’s fun to get on stage and sing. When I first get up there I’m super nervous, but once I start performing the nervousness falls away.”

Andrew has overcome other personal obstacles, which might have kept another, less determined individual from pursuing a career in the limelight. “When I use music, I need it in large print so I can see, which is due to [my] ocular cutaneous albinism,” Andrew explained. “Also, when I perform outside I need to be in the shade or [use] lots of sunscreen and a hat. Socializing with fans is hard, since I have autism. It’s not that I don’t want to talk to them, but I can’t find the words to speak.

“I have a Golden Doodle who is being trained to be my service dog,” continued Andrew. “He’ll be trained to go with me to some of my venues when I sing. Maybe he will even howl along to the songs!”

In other ways, Andrew’s disabilities have been a plus. “I’m very focused, which helps me practice until a song is performance-worthy,” he said. “And when I’m writing a song, if I can’t think of a lyric, I just keeping thinking until I come up with something. My memory is really good, which helps me remember song lyrics. Since I overcame speech problems because I didn’t talk for a long time, it’s made me feel like I can accomplish more.”

Andrew is 17 now, and has been playing the guitar since he was 10. That’s when he started taking lessons and got his first guitar. “I wanted one after my older brother started taking guitar lessons and asked for one,” said Andrew. “We bought it at Toys “R” Us.”

He’s also been taking singing lessons from Vera Warrick for the last two years, because Andrew has big, professional aspirations. “One of my recent goals is to get on The Voice,” he said. “I’d also love to play on The Grand Ole Opry. I also want to gain more experience playing in front of crowds. I’m hoping to make a living from doing it. One of my biggest goals is to help people realize what country music really is, like reviving the old country music. I’ve also written some of my own songs and hope to write more in the near future.”

Andrew benefits from family and friends who are 100 percent supportive of his dreams. His mother, Angela Braach (a graduate of the Council’s Partners in Policymaking® Leadership Institute), and his dad, Chris Braach, keep Andrew’s career news up-to-date through social media. His friend Dalton Barrett, a producer at WGNS Radio, helped Andrew make his CD. Another friend, Amanda Johnson of Creative Photography, takes stunning pictures of Andrew for his CD covers and flyers. Country artists Brian Warren and Brenda Lynn Allen invited Andrew to sing with them at Duck River Country Store, and he’s opened up for The Cooter River Band and Daniel Rothwell and the Overall Creek Band. “All of my family and friends that live in Montana have been supportive as well,” said Andrew. “This past summer, they invited me to sing at church, around campfires, and [for] my grandparents’ anniversary and birthday party.”

If you’re interested in listening to Andrew’s music, he’s in the process of setting up a YouTube channel for his music. Currently, Andrew has videos posted and CDs for purchase on his Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/andrewmarkbraach/>.

“I like that people are inspired by my music,” said Andrew. “That’s a good feeling.”

# Article 2: Indicator Art: Shining a Light on Hidden Talents by Debby Throckmorton

Image descriptions: Photo 1 shows a small group of adults with disabilities of varying ages posing for a group photo and smiling. Photo 2 shows a young woman with Down syndrome, long curly hair, and glasses singing into a microphone and smiling with her eyes closed, mid-song. Photo 3 shows a small group of adults with disabilities wearing costumes for a skit they are doing about Scooby Doo, the TV show. One person is dressed as the character Scooby, another is Fred, another is Velma, another is Shaggy, another is Daphne and two people are wearing scary masks dressed as ghosts or monsters. Photo 4 shows 4 men, one of whom is a songwriter and the other 3 who are adults with disabilities who are participants in a music class.

IndicatorArt is a not-for-profit agency that provides programs that teach creative skills and encourage self-expression. Matt Palmo started this organization in Buffalo, New York five years ago, and hired me to start the Nashville branch. I am an acting, songwriting, and singing performance coach from Nashville. Some of my students have worked on television shows such as American Idol, CSI, and Hannah Montana, and starred in films like Tim Burton’s Alice in Wonderland.

How we treat vulnerable groups and individuals is an indicator of how advanced our society is. IndicatorArt's mission is to enhance the lives of those with significant challenges. Our programs help every participant explore creative expression in an inclusive, fun, and respectful environment. In the time we’ve been in Tennessee, we have helped more than 50 adults accomplish their dreams of having an artistic voice in the community. Most students had never been on stage nor had an audience to enjoy their artistic gifts. We want to shine a light on their talents.

We shine that light through several art mediums:

### Film

Students learn every aspect of filming a movie, by helping write an original short screenplay and then fully producing it in the six-week workshop. Students not only act but learn about all aspects of film production, from creating sets to operating cameras. At the end of the workshop, the film is premiered at a showcase event where the public is invited, and each student receives a DVD of their original work.

### Singing

Each student sings a song of his or her choice, and participates in a group singing performance. The students receive vocal training and learn about professional singing techniques. They visit an established recording studio to record the group song with a professional singer. At the end of the workshop, the singers perform their songs for the public at a showcase event. Every student receives a CD of the group song.

### Songwriting

Students learn how to write and perform an original song. In the workshop, they are taught the basics of songwriting while working on their original songs. Students also spend a class co-writing with one of country music’s hit songwriters. At the end of the workshop, students perform their original songs for the public, and each one receives a demo of his or her song.

### Sketch Comedy

Think "clean Saturday Night Live." Students learn acting, improvisation, teamwork, and comedic timing, as well as how to write and film an original comedic scene. At the end of the six weeks, the final scene will be shown to the public at a showcase event, and each participant receives an edited version of the show on DVD.

Starting this branch of IndicatorArt has changed my life! I am always so excited to see how my students grow from the first class to becoming stars on stage at the end performance. I have learned way more than I have taught over this last year. The most important thing that I have learned is that there are no limits. I plan to keep expanding on what we can do, and eventually want to make a feature-length film.

Our first album comes out this year, and it’s full of songs that the songwriters wrote and the singing students perform. We plan to have videos to accompany every song.

Staff, family, and friends shared that IndicatorArt has changed other lives, too. Our students are more confident in everything they do. They are developing friendships and learning to work together as a team, because they all have to work together to make a great show at the end of each six-week workshop. Students are learning to use their voices through acting in the sketch comedies and singing workshops. The songwriters are learning that their thoughts matter and can become beautiful compositions. There’s so much excitement in every show, and that translates to the audience.

“Once you get on stage for the first time you have all these people looking at you, and you start to get stage fright,” said Matt Branch, one of the IndicatorArt students. “But once you overcome your fear, that’s when you start to realize you’re actually showing them what you learned through rehearsal. You understand that even celebrities [have] felt stage fright, but you can’t back down, because you have to show them the gift that you have. You think, ‘Yeah, I can do this.’”

IndicatorArt Tennessee programs are offered at two locations, in Nashville and White Bluff. For more information, visit www.indicatorart.com or the agency’s IndicatorArt Nashville Facebook page.

# Poetry

Both poems are by April Meredith. April’s bio: Tennessee Partners in Policymaking®

graduate April Meredith has had numerous poems and feature articles published in

Breaking Ground. Besides being an avid writer and reader, April works at Empower

Tennessee, where she teaches youth and adults about using their voices and developing their independent living skills.

## How Long Does It Take to Say Goodbye? by April Meredith

*A tribute to Tabitha Paige West (2003-2019) and her mother Karen.*

*May we never say goodbye to Tabby’s legacy.*

How long does it take to say goodbye

When everyday her beauty

Is painted in the sky

When I feel her breath

Carried on the wings of butterflies

When I see her sweet face

As I close my eyes

When I stand lost

At her bedroom door

When I sense her presence now

As much as I did before

When I have waves of emotions

Like those on ocean shores

When I continue to hear

Her keyboard music sounds

Resonating in the hallway,

Echoing all around

When everywhere I go

Parts of her legacy can be found

When glimpses of her spirit

Are on happy children’s faces

As they play with friends

In accessible places

When my heart aches

In its empty spaces

When I miss fixing

Her gorgeous curls

When her colorful art

Still decorates my world

When I yearn to hold

My precious girl

How long

Does

It take

To say…

## A Beautiful, Anxious Mind by April Meredith

Sometimes I feel like

I am barely clinging on

To a glimpse of hope

Like the last brown leaf

On a dying tree

In fall

Sometimes I feel like

Endless space

Speckled with starry spots

Of brilliance

But tortured with

Infinite choices

Sometimes I feel

Powerful and purposeful

As crucial as the air we breathe

But just the same

Taken for granted and unseen

As if not there at all

Sometimes I am

As motivated and determined

As the hungry lioness

Prowling for prey

While other times completely immobilized

By my internal voices

# Article 3: Brent Redmond’s Four-Wheel Art by Deborah McMillan, Director, DIDD Services, East TN Personal Care Service

image description: Photo of Brent, a man with disabilities, is wearing a baseball cap and T-shirt and holding a very large model car in his hands.

Art comes in many shapes and forms. For Knoxville native Brent Redmond, it comes on four wheels.

There are no off-the-shelf model-car kits in Brent’s workshop. His replicas are absolute works of art, complete with hand-sewn leather seats, “suicide” doors that open automatically, and functioning windows. Brent uses a huge range of skills to build his model cars, which are sometimes up to three feet in length.

The artist begins by developing the design for his vehicle using one of several methods: searching the internet for ideas, studying information from car dealerships, or, more frequently, using his imagination to create concept vehicles with futuristic features. His craft is so absorbing, Brent often spends several hours each day in his workshop. He devotes extra time to making sure the finish stands out, with vibrant colors like candy-apple red with flecks of gold. Pearlescent black diamond and metallic silver are two of his favorites.

Brent enjoys the challenge of buying materials and beginning projects from scratch. He and his personal assistant, Kimberley Kerr, regularly visit local hardware stores and hobby shops, and Brent has built lasting relationships with employees at several suppliers. Brent and Kim recently spent the day in Pigeon Forge for the annual Fall Rod Run, where Brent decided his next vehicle would be a street-rod replica.

This past March, a jury presented Brent one of four Silver Easel awards for outstanding creativity, expression, and design at the “From My Perspective: An Exhibition for All Artists” event hosted by Trousdale School in Cleveland, Tennessee.

Most recently, Brent won first prize as a TVA & I Fair exhibitor with his ultramodern version of a Knoxville Sheriff’s Department cruiser, which featured a working red and blue light bar and front wench. In October, Brent was invited by Sheriff Tom Spangler to display his art at the Knox County Sheriff’s Department.

Brent has no intention of putting the brakes on his craft, and plans to expand his designs and exhibiting. For Brent, his art is an avenue of expression, and a way to connect with car enthusiasts worldwide.

# Fine Art Collection 2

## “Marshlands,” by Barbara Shirley

A fairly realistic drawing portrays a goose about to take flight from a marshland, in a landscape with water, reeds and grasses. The colors of the artwork are browns, white, grays and other fall or winter colors.

Barbara Shirley of Madison incorporates a variety of mediums including ink, charcoal, acrylics, and oils, and is continually seeking new combinations of materials to create her art, which often expresses her love of nature.

## “Giraffes,” by LeeAnn Wilson

A realistic-looking drawing or painting of a larger parent giraffe reaching its head down to nuzzle the head of a smaller baby giraffe.

Artist Leann Wilson lives in Clarksville. She said, “I love to paint. It brings me peace of mind.”

## “Expression,” by Augie Collier

A drawing of an older woman. She has dark hair pulled back from her face, glasses, a bright blue dress with a white swirling pattern and a serious expression on her face. She is seated at a table with her hands folded up under her chin. There is a decoration, perhaps a mirror, on the wall behind her.

Augie Collier has a gift for drawing out the personal strength of the subjects in his art. Augie works in various mediums, including acrylics, oils, charcoal, and oil pastel, and used oil pastels for Expression.

## “Dove of Peace,” pottery by Louise McKown

A photo of a piece of pottery that is shaped like a trapezoid, wider at the bottom and narrower on top. The bottom of the piece is painted green like grass. There is a detailed outline of a bird, a dove, perched on the grass with decorative swirls inside its outline. The rest of the pottery is gray, like a cloudy day.

Louise McKown is a potter who has a rare progressive neurological condition. She worked for 20 years at the East TN Technology Access Center, and is a Partners in Policymaking® graduate. She takes pottery classes at the Oak Ridge Art Center.

# Poetry: Make Believe by Timothy “Urban Thoughts” Moore

CONTENT WARNING: The following poem is an important reflection on the author’s struggle with depression. It contains a description of suicide, and some readers may find the content disturbing.

A poem titled “Make Believe” by Timothy “Urban Thoughts” Moore

My favorite moments of childhood were playing make believe.

Pretending to be Spiderman,

hanging off furniture that became sides of skyscrapers.

My mother yelling,

“Boy, if you don’t get yo butt off of my couch!”

Me - Jumping, landing and posing

“Yes - Ma’am.”

Even had the full costume

with the nerf gun web shooters.

Depending on the storyline,

With the flick of a wrist,

my brothers became either:

bank robbers to punish

or citizens to save.

I became really good at playing make believe.

In fact, as an adult,

I still do.

When people ask: “How Are You Feeling?”

Most expect you to answer with “I’m okay,”

even if you aren’t.

In the South, answering honestly

leads to awkward conversations

about praying the sadness away

like these knees and palms ain’t got callouses

from pressing these frustrations

in between àṣẹ and amens.

I’ve taught myself to be quiet

rather than voice

that I am one of the 300 million diagnosed

with the mental illness disorder, DEPRESSION,

the number one leading cause of disability worldwide.

And even still - it’s difficult for me to give it name

or space

or to admit that sometimes these tears just come

like long lost friends that ain’t good for nothing

but reminding you of the past fun

you used to have.

Or worse, moments that you don’t even realize

that there are tears on your cheeks.

or sadness that has no origin.

It just is –

A black hole hovering over a black body

daring any and all not to come too close

less they be consumed.

In moments of depression,

I forget that I can breathe.

Suffocating seems so normal.

My lungs lose muscle memory

of how to inflate.

My chest feels like a casket

for my breath to bury itself in.

Saying “I’m awesome” is me –

pushing back the walls that are always closing in

even when I stand outside to count to ten.

"Alright", is easier than stomaching the statistics

that over 800,000 people struggle to be "Alright".

Nearly one person every forty seconds disappears into total eclipse.

I embraced the moon’s shadow once.

Slit my wrist ‘til the blood painted a crescent on my hand.

When it's crushing you to answer,

“Are you good?”,

I empathize with Atlas.

I know how the weight of the world feels.

I want to explain on those days “good”

is just getting out of a bed that

seems to be more quicksand than comfort on most mornings

that sometimes the only good

is the classroom that I teach in.

Good are the moments, I get to ask kids:

“How are you?”

Days that I get to paint a smile

that is often more times Joker to me.

On most days,

in these classrooms,

I get to silence my fears and become someone’s hero.

I get to show them that no matter how bad it hurts

that you can get up

one more time.

That the villains of my experiences won’t force me

to make believe

all the time.

One day I'll be able to stand in the moment,

shoulders back

and when they ask,

look them in their eyes

and say: "I'm doing just fine,"

and mean it.

Poet bio: Timothy (Urban Thoughts) Moore is a nationally-recognized spoken word artist and award-winning educator based in Memphis. Timothy has been an outspoken voice regarding his own diagnosed depression. He uses hip-hop, poetry, and spoken word to educate youth and advocate for civil rights, mental health/disability awareness, and homelessness.

# Poetry: Life on the Spectrum by Samantha C. Teasley

Hold my hand, and here we go

In this big world, so much to know

Let’s go at my speed

Let’s stay at my pace

Here we go, Mama

I’ll put on a brave face

Noises, colors, smells and lights

For them it’s okay, for me it’s a fight

What’s coming next?

I need to know

I don’t like it here

I have to go

This place is too much

And I need to leave

Take me home, Mama

I need to breathe

I’ve made it to my safety zone

It’s quiet here, and it’s my home

You hold me close and say my name

You know that my feelings are not just a game

You calm me down and make me smile

Mama, can we just stay here a while?

I’ll try again some other day

We can do this, I’ll be okay

This world is big, this I know

Just hold my hand and here we go

Poet bio: Samantha Teasley lives in Sumner County and has two children with autism. She wrote this poem to describe how everyday experiences may be difficult for those on the spectrum.

# Article 4: Telling Stories through Art by Commissioner Brad Turner, Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Image descriptions: Four pieces of artwork are featured in this article. The first is called “Purple Nexus” by artist Austin King. It is an abstract painting with purple and white swirls all over the canvas; it almost looks like purple waves on a seashore washing up on sand. The second piece is “Untitled Abstract” by artist Derrick Freeman. It features bold brushstrokes of purples, blues, golds and white all across the canvas, layering colors over each other. The third piece is “Messy Flag” by Morgan Vice. It is a horizontal rectangular painting with a bright blue square section at the top left, and then the rest of the canvas features waves or swirls of red and white that appear like the red and white stripes of the American flag. The last is a piece by Commissioner Turner’s daughter titled “Kinsley’s Web” by Kinsley Turner. The drawing is divided diagonally from the center, with alternating sections of white and red thick stripes, and blue and white thick stripes. It appears to look like a red, white and blue web.

Article begins here with a quote:

“Art is not always about pretty things. It’s about who we are, what happened to us, and how our lives are affected.” – Elizabeth Brown

This quote is simple, yet very powerful when it relates to the arts in our community. Every single piece of art inside our hallways at the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) and our community tells a story about not only the artist themselves, but the world they live in. It allows us to expand outside verbal communication, and better understand the artist’s spirit and soul through picture.

As many of you are aware, my daughter, Kinsley, is non-verbal. One of her favorite things to do is communicate through photographs. She will pull me down next to her and want to snap a picture with me on her iPad. She’ll also scroll through the pictures and find her friends, favorite teachers, and other people or images that have meaning in her life, and then hold the iPad up so I can see the picture. She’s telling me her story through the art and images that she helped to create.

Our challenge is preparing ourselves to listen to an artist so we don’t just hear persons with disabilities, but we work to understand! Art is compelling on its own account, but when used to relay stories, experiences, realities, fears, and futures, it demands an audience that seeks to better understand. Throughout history, art has been used to inspire change and unite societies. In our own recent history, photographs and images from Vietnam showed the harsh reality of a world halfway around the globe, and it began to turn public opinion on the conflict. Videos and photographs from the civil rights struggle in the 1960s moved the needle in public perception, after many American homes saw the injustices towards African-Americans for the first time.

I want to share a few pictures from my friends Derrick, Austin, Morgan, and my daughter Kinsley. These pictures and crafts give us a glimpse into their souls as people. It reminds us that everyone not only has something to say, but a specific message and meaning behind it. Are we seeking to listen, as opposed to seeking to respond? Are we working towards providing ways for their voices to reach more people? These are just some of the questions we ask ourselves inside the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities every day.

I’m proud of our partnership with the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the privilege we have to work side-by-side. Previous DIDD leaders Jim Henry and Debbie Payne, provided the foundation for change and empowerment through their belief in our community and the individuals we support every day.

I want to encourage all of us to find ways to see a picture, sculpture, painting, or any other form of art in a deeper light. Let’s work to better understand not only the artist but what they want us to see through their creation. Understanding others is something the world needs more of. Art can bridge cultural, language, socio-economic, and other barriers. Let’s challenge ourselves to see every individual for who they are and what they’re saying through the reality they create in their art.

Let the kind of change that can be generated from art start with me!

# Fine Art Collection 3

## “Golden Garden,” by Derrick Freeman

A square canvas covered with purples, blues and greens overlapping one another. There are yellow flowers with brown centers speckled throughout the purple and blue and green background, so it looks like a blurry abstract painting of golden flowers in a garden.

Derrick Freeman is a self-taught artist with autism. He has exhibited his artwork throughout Tennessee, including the Tennessee Governor’s Mansion, Vanderbilt University, Lipscomb University, Tennessee Disability MegaConference, and the Knoxville Museum of Art. Derrick has been the recipient of several awards for his community advocacy work, including The Arc Mid-South’s Outstanding Artist and Performer Award and the Future Horizons Inc.’s Dr. Temple Grandin Award for Outstanding Success.

## “Sisters drawing,” by Caroline Mattheis

A colored pencil drawing of two young girls facing away, towards a view of a lake with mountains in the background and birds in the sky. The two girls are at the water’s edge, holding hands. One sister is in a pink shirt and pink skirt, with long brown hair blowing in the wind. The other sister is seated in a wheelchair and she is pointing in the distance to the mountains or the birds to show her sister.

Caroline Mattheiss is an 8th grader in Chattanooga. This is Caroline’s picture of herself and her older sister, Emily, who love to spend time outdoors together.

# Article 5: Disability Arts Access in Rural Tennessee: A program of Friends Life Community by Waverly Ann Harris, Executive Director, Friends Life Community

Image Descriptions: There are 3 photos with this article. Photo 1 shows a woman standing behind three adults seated at a table with craft supplies in front of them. Caption reads: “Teaching Artist, Candace Gooch, coaches participants of DAART in self-expression through pottery. Class sponsored by Lilo+Company.” Photo 2 shows a group of adults with and without disabilities standing behind a table with art supplies posing for a photo. Caption reads: “Group photo of seven DAART participants from Carroll County, two Teaching Artists, Sarah Edwards and Candace Gooch, and two volunteers, Arianna Whaley and Sel Montgomery.” Photo 3 shows a circle of adults with disabilities seated in chairs in a half-circle, and some appear to be wearing types of costumes and hats. They are listening to a woman in the center who is gesturing and speaking to the group. Caption reads: “Teaching Artist, Pat Forgy, leads participants of DAART in self-advocacy through musical expression. Class sponsored by West Tennessee Public Utility District. “

Article begins here:

Walking in for the first time must have been scary. As a 26-year-old with autism, it was not facing the unknown that took courage. It was facing the expected rejection that often happens in new places with new people. Similar experiences had often led to bullying, being asked to leave, and embarrassment. However, there are limited opportunities in rural Tennessee for individuals with intellectual disabilities to find community and belonging outside the school system. When John’s family learned about a new program for young adults with disabilities to access arts in Carroll County, they decided it was worth the risks.

Within minutes of arriving, John’s shoulders began to relax and his eyes got brighter. A smile spread across his face. This was his first time participating in a performing arts class, yet he seemed to come alive. He spoke up clearly and was able to express himself to others. He experienced belonging through acceptance and connection with peers.

John was one of 12 participants in Disability Arts Access in Rural Tennessee (DAART), a program where people with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) meet every month and learn to express and advocate for themselves. Through different arts activities, they connect with themselves, their peers, and the larger community through the common language of art.

DAART is a program of Friends Life Community, in partnership with the Dixie Performing Arts Center in Huntingdon, Tennessee. It brings unique opportunities to adults with disabilities and helps them grow through the arts. Huntingdon is in rural Carroll County where, like many rural counties, there are few services after high school.

This effort began in 2018, led by Carroll County native Sarah Edwards, now performing arts specialist at Friends Life Community. It features partnerships with 10 local teaching artists, and has trained more than 50 volunteers from Bethel College. The volunteers ensure that more people in Carroll County are able to include individuals with disabilities into current and future arts programs.

“DAART has been the most important and impactful thing I have done in my professional career,” said Sarah Edwards. “The Dixie Performing Arts Center changed my life when I was growing up in Carroll County. It gave me a voice and a place to belong. Now, to have the opportunity to facilitate the creative process with individuals who have never participated in arts classes before is a true honor. To see their own excitement when they feel heard and seen, sometimes for the first time, continues to inspire me in this field that I love and believe in.”

Developing art skills is not often on the list of priorities for young adults with disabilities. Of the 12 participants in DAART, only two had been in an art class before. Most young adults complete high school and transition programs with a focus on employment in the community. Yet many adults with disabilities age out of the school system lacking the basic skills required for inclusive employment, like confidence, self-expression, and self-advocacy.

For individuals with disabilities to participate in community-based activities and employment, leaders in the community must create opportunities for people with I/DD to flourish. Participation in the arts is a powerful way to break through barriers and create connections between people that go deeper than verbal communication and surface understanding.

Through DAART, participants learned 10 different types of art, including poetry, dance, songwriting, design, and pottery, all led by local teaching artists. Classes met once a month, working toward a community showcase in May. Each teaching artist was trained by Friends Life Community to help the participants experience the art form being presented, and to develop skills that will lead to greater self-advocacy. Through this experience, the teaching artists and the participants gained a better understanding of each other, resulting, we hope, in opportunities that are more inclusive in the future.

## **Side-Bar about Program Expansion:** Advocacy Through the Arts

This program is expanding! The Council began an Advocacy Through the Arts grant with Friends Life Community in November. The grant provides funds to offer art classes for Tennesseans with I/DD – including continuing DAART in Carroll County – and then share the art on a statewide self-advocacy tour. Be on the lookout for more information in the coming year about an event near you!

For more information about Friends Life Community’s programming, DAART/Advocacy Through the Arts, or how to increase advocacy through the arts in your own community, please reach out to us at admin@friendslife.org or call 615-730-9370.

# Article 6: A Beautiful Legacy by Karen West

Image descriptions: In this article, there is a large painting and a photo. The painting is large bold splotches of color, mostly pinks and whites and greens – it has a feeling of spring flowers. It is just abstract strokes of these colors on a textured canvas. The photo shows a young girl with curly brown hair in a ponytail, with bright pink sunglasses and a big grin on her face as she sits outside in her wheelchair in the sunshine. Her hands and shirt are covered in paint as she creates a painting on a canvas resting on her lap.

Article begins here:

Tabitha Paige West was born on December 26, 2003. At the age of one-and-a-half, she was diagnosed with the genetic syndrome 1p36 Deletion Syndrome, which caused her to have intellectual and developmental disabilities. However, Tabitha never let her limitations stop her from expressing herself artistically on paper or canvas.

At the age of four, she entered her first art contest (The Creative Expressions Art Contest for People with Epilepsy), and ended up as a national finalist. Her artwork was subsequently published in art books, calendars, and exhibited around the country in children’s hospitals and art museums!

It was then that I realized what a beautiful gift Tabitha had been given. She went on to receive many more recognitions for her talent, including awards from the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Creative Expressions art exhibit, and the Nashville Mayor’s Advisory Committee for people with disabilities.

Around the age of 12, Tabitha began selling her original artwork, prints, and stationery featuring her work. All of her earnings went towards the costs of her own medical care. At the age of 15, Tabitha left her earthly body to go on to painting masterpieces in the sky. Her artwork remains to be a beautiful legacy for all to enjoy.

Author bio: Karen West, Tabitha’s mom, is a 2014-15 Graduate of the Partners in Policymaking® Institute and a Governor-appointed member of the Council on Developmental Disabilities. Tabitha’s artwork and stationery is still available for purchase through her social media page at <https://www.facebook.com/TabithaWestArtist/>.

# Poetry

## Ryan by David S. Pointer

They called Ryan fast.

They called Ryan to float through safety first minefields.

They called Ryan their “Handicapable Hard Charger.”

They called Ryan their “Special Needs Knight.”

They called Ryan their “Differently-abled Amigo.”

They called Ryan their “Challenged Champion.”

Ryan called them back even when the language

wasn't quite right, and wrenched things up right.

Poet bio: David S. Pointer lives in Murfreesboro with his daughters and kitty cats. David has recently published work in Spitball magazine, and “The 5-2: Poems on Crime,” and has been a regular contributor to Breaking Ground Arts issues.

## Stir the coals for me by Jesee Hill

Let’s awaken what once was fragrant

The beauties, the things that made us laugh,

the things that made us sing and dance

Let’s awaken the songs which God shuttled through our souls,

the fibers--in all of their hues--

creating beautiful, unfinished tapestries

Stir the coals for me

When life’s Novembers hinder the springs,

Deferring hopes, expiring dreams--

When I am cold, a barren tree,

Stir the coals for me

When no beauties I can see,

it is your love, the remedy.

My love will warm you in the spring

Please, stir the coals for me

Poet bio: Jesee Hill has cerebral palsy and is a graduate of the Tennessee Partners in Policymaking® 2015-2016 Class. He lives in Watertown.

## The Counselor On Vacation by Brian C. McHan

He talked to clients all day

Listening to their problems

He dealt with management

He dealt with staff

He went home and

He dealt with his family

But the next day was vacation day

He went into the woods

And listened to the birds

And the wind

And when night fell

He took pictures of the lightning

When the storm came

And listened to the thunder

He spent a day

No longer listening to men

And listened to God for a while

Whom he will meet

When his time with men is done

Poet bio: Brian C. McHan has been a faithful contributor to “Breaking Ground” Arts issues ever since he graduated from the Tennessee Partners in Policymaking® program in 2002. According to Brian, “This one is about my counselor who has to listen to the things I complain about with my schizophrenia.”

# Back Cover Artwork: Trippy-Hippy, by Mitchell Wiseman

This piece of art shows all sorts of abstract swirls and patterns and curves of color. The center shows a wheel divided into different colors, and from the center radiates out different patterns – stripes, odd flower shapes, various twisting lines, triangles, what looks like striped snake creatures. All sorts of colors are included in different parts of the drawing.

Mitchell Wiseman lives in Shelbyville, where he attends the Centerstone Peer Support Center. Mitchell expresses himself with his personal and unique abstracts. He said having others appreciate his work means the world to him.