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What's Cooking?



Council on
Developmental Disabilities

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What's Cooking at TSU Extension?

by Tiffany Horton

Photos by Lauren Louthan and Bryce Schmidt

Over the last year or so, my 21-year-old son, Joshua, has expressed a desire to move out and live on his own; a desire and goal I fully support. Unfortunately, like so many parents, after a long day, I'm usually looking for the most efficient way of getting things done. That means me preparing all the family meals instead of involving Joshua in that process had become the norm. So when we began to discuss some of the practical skills he would need to successfully live independently, the topic of meal preparation was at the top of the list.

I asked him what his plans were in terms of cooking his meals. He quickly laid out his plan of eating cereal every morning and ordering take out for lunch and dinner. After hearing that, I explained that not only would he eventually become very unhealthy and lose his abs that he is so proud of, he would also run out of money in just a few short weeks.

Fast forward to 2016. The Arc Rutherford County was invited to participate in the Annual Community Baby Shower sponsored by United Way and the Rutherford County Health Department. During this event, I met Tiffany Schmidt, Tennessee State University Cooperative Extension Agent with Rutherford County Extension Center. Ms. Schmidt was explaining the nutrition education curriculum from TSU Extension called, "Eating Smart During Pregnancy" that they use to educate expectant mothers living on a limited budget. I thought, "WOW, this is an amazing program!"

I explained that I had a young adult son with a disability who was interested in living more independently, and thought he and others would greatly benefit from the information she was sharing about eating healthy on a tight budget. I inquired about classes that he would be eligible for, but unfortunately at that time there wasn't anything being offered. After further discussion, we agreed to collaborate in planning and preparing for a similar class to accommodate participants with disabilities, focusing on healthy eating and meal preparation.

A year later, on June 8, 2017, after several meetings discussing the logistics on how best to cover the material



It's pancake time at Cooking Capers class

and which recipes to include, we finally started the six-week "Cooking Capers" class at the Rutherford County Extension Center. We had an amazing group of eight participants and their caregivers from various counties.

I think flexibility was the key to the success of the class. We made several tweaks along the way, from readjusting the cooking stations to demonstrating each step of the recipes in an effort to maximize participation. The focus was on teaching healthy eating habits and learning new cooking skills to help facilitate as much independence as possible.

Some of the various topics covered during the classes were food safety, cooking skills, utensil uses, identifying healthy food groups, and planning/shopping/saving - getting at the cost per meal. Each two-hour session was packed with great information and hands-on activities. Participants practiced making recipes step-by-step and enjoyed eating the fruits of their labor! Many of them had never made homemade pancakes, parfaits, apple salad and omelets.

At the end of each class, everyone took home a recipe card and a new kitchen gadget or tool that they learned

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Helping People “Navigate Their World” – the TSU Extension Program

By Ned Andrew Solomon, Editor-in-Chief, Breaking Ground Magazine

University Extension is a nationwide educational network that aims to “extend” university expertise, research, information and education to families and communities across their state. Each U.S. state and territory has a state office at its land-grant university and a network of local or regional offices. Tennessee’s university extension state office is located within the University of Tennessee (UT). UT and Tennessee State University (TSU) administer together the Tennessee Cooperative Extension Service.

Traditionally, when most people think of University Extension programs, they think of training and resources

around farming and agriculture. You might be surprised to learn, as the Council was, that Extension programs offer a host of educational opportunities for families in a number of areas, including health, nutrition, parenting, home economics, financial planning and saving, youth leadership, emergency preparedness and more. While there are UT Extension offices located in all 95 counties of Tennessee, in nearly 50 of those counties there are also TSU Extension programs (with a focus on outreach to low-income or low-resource families). In these areas, both Extension networks frequently collaborate on conducting

Cooking ... *Continued from page 3*

to use. By the end of the six-week cooking class, there were some participants that not only said they had tried making some of the recipes they learned in class, but they also purchased the child-safe knife that we introduced during class. This was especially exciting to hear because a particular attendee was afraid of using standard kitchen knives, and now she was excited to prepare her own food more independently with a knife she was comfortable using.

In addition to the participants learning new skills and becoming more independent, the caregivers also reported that the class was beneficial in teaching them new ways to assist the people they were helping, which also made them realize that the individuals they were supporting could do so much more!

As for Joshua, although he was not initially too sure about the idea of taking a cooking class, every time he showed up he had fun, learned something new and ate something tasty! The best part came several weeks after class ended. He woke up one morning and told me he was making himself an omelet for breakfast. And, with very little assistance from me, he did just that!



Learning the tricks of the trade at Cooking Capers class

As a result of the implementation and success of this program, Rutherford County Extension, with the help of community volunteers, offered another six-week cooking class in October utilizing hands-on activities and providing the opportunity to prepare more delicious, healthy and affordable recipes. My hope is that other UT/TSU Cooperative Extension Agents will look into starting similar programs in their counties as well.

Tiffany Horton is the parent of a 22-year-old son with a disability and two daughters, 19 and 14. She is a 2014-15 graduate of the Tennessee Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute and a board member of The Arc Rutherford County.

educational workshops and providing services. They connect families in their local communities to valuable training, education, information and resources.

The Council has been grateful to build a partnership with UT's Extension network, specifically their Family and Consumer Sciences division, over the past couple of years, and this summer began to learn more about how TSU's Extension network serves families in Tennessee. Council staff conducted training for Extension agents around disability sensitivity and resources their agents can share with families. UT Extension's Statewide Human Development Specialist Heather Wallace presented to our Partners in Policymaking graduates about Extension programs. University Extension offices provide a way for us to connect with families who have members with disabilities at the local level and get information to families who may not otherwise be connected to the disability service system yet. Through these collaborative efforts and this article, we hope more members of the disability community will explore how they can connect to their local Extension programs to pursue creative ways to reach and serve Tennesseans with disabilities and their families.

A Look at TSU's Extension Program

"We help consumers navigate their world," said Leslie Speller-Henderson, Family and Consumer Sciences Program Leader for Tennessee State University. "Under that would be the food and nutrition side, the health education side, human development, family economics and home. These are all topics that staff, which I supervise, touch."

Speller-Henderson also "touches" these topics, because she has to ensure that the information is being delivered to the public accurately and effectively. She also makes her staff aware of professional development opportunities, like conferences and trainings that will help them do their important work for Tennessee's families.

And it's a lot of information to keep current on. The area of **Food and Nutrition** is one of the most robust subjects.



Leslie Speller-Henderson



From left to right: Shanail Brown (TSU SNAP-Ed PA, Davidson), Marina Fahmy (Intern, Davidson), Ebone' Colclough (SNAP-Ed Agent, Davidson) and Latasha Holloway (EFNEP PA, Davidson). Ebone' explains the recipe she and her team are preparing.

"We help families make healthy food choices," explained Speller-Henderson. "Sometimes it's within their limited dollar budget. Making healthy food choices can also help defend against certain diseases they might be dealing with that are food-related or health-related."

The area of **Health Education** is primarily about health literacy – in other words, understanding the "language" of healthcare. "Take the Affordable Care Act," said Speller-Henderson. "When the information came out about co-pays and deductibles, it was language that a lot of people who haven't had insurance didn't understand. We also educate about medications - how to take them, the interactions between different meds and the risks of taking too many meds."

Living well with chronic diseases is another aspect of Health Education, as is, surprisingly, **Emergency Preparedness**. "Day care centers are one place we focus on that," Speller-Henderson said. "Helping teachers understand, when an emergency comes, how do you take care of that child in your care? They may need a backpack that has diapers in it, and the parents' phone number. Sometimes day cares haven't thought through that level of preparedness."

Additionally, TSU Extension staff occasionally train in conjunction with the Red Cross around home/family escape plans, and meeting up in a safe location outside the home. They also promote having three days' worth of water, cans with non-perishable foods and storing copies

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Project SEARCH at Progress - *A success story*

by Lily Wojcik, PR/Events Manager, Progress, Inc.

Photos by Dana Klebs, Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH is an internship program for youth and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities that affects lives far beyond the walls of a particular hospital, office or hotel Project SEARCH site. The program is well known amongst employment providers worldwide as a “door opener” to a lifetime of work opportunities for individuals with disabilities; one that fills the gap and gives participants an opportunity to “try on” various roles within a field before launching into what can sometimes be an otherwise intimidating or uncertain work environment. Interns come from a wide range of unique backgrounds, families and living situations, but they all have several things in common: a desire to explore work, learn new skills and secure a future built on their own terms. Most participants are employment-ready at the close of the



Ron with coworkers Raykeyda and Ms. Z

Navigate ... *Continued from page 5*

of vital records in a container that you can grab and go.

Home education courses are about using energy-saving strategies and making homes “healthier” and safer, including being aware of environmental contaminants and toxins. For **Family Economics**, TSU Extension staff try to help families increase their savings, and give guidance on spending limited funds wisely and planning for the future. A special program called “On My Own” targets teens who are anxious to move out of the family home but may not have a realistic picture of what they’ll have to have in place, and how much living independently can cost.

Human Development information and resources help families improve their parenting skills. “It’s different than it was when our parents or grandparents were raising us,” said Speller-Henderson. “There are many ‘21st century issues’, like decreasing screen time, and deciding what age is appropriate for a child to have an iPad or a cell phone. Should there be computers in the child’s



Light Chicken Salad made during one of the classes

bedroom, and are kids getting enough exercise, instead of being glued to their electronics?”

The topic also involves learning to interact with others, how to build relationships and, in general, strengthening the family. “We try to be aware of all the needs, from the cradle to the grave.”

For more information about the TSU Extension program, or to take advantage of their services and resources, visit <http://www.tnstate.edu/extension/> for an Extension office nearest to you.

9-month internship, having benefited from a strong network of people committed to their success.

The Project SEARCH sites of Progress, a disability service provider in Nashville, offer this same platform for success for all participants. Interns embark on an unfamiliar journey each fall at community businesses, and by spring they are ready to take on the world. Rontravius (Ron) Hayes is a recent graduate of the Project SEARCH site at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt, where he is now employed as a Perioperative Support Tech. His job duties include transporting case carts from the OR (Operating Room) to either Sterile Processing or to the loading dock where they are taken to an off-site facility to be cleaned.

Ron originally heard of Project SEARCH from Pam Hollingsworth, Employment Co-Director of Progress. "I met Ron several times before, both at school and at employment presentations, and each time he expressed his desire to work," Pam said. "When he heard about Project SEARCH he was really excited about it."

Ron graduated from high school in May of 2016, and that August he started with the intern class of 2017 at Monroe Carell. Ron was the first of his class to be employed, landing a job after only his second rotation, which was long before the end of the program. Dana Klebs, Job Coach at Project SEARCH at Monroe Carell, emphasized what a stand-out guy Ron was from the start. "Right away Ron made connections on his own; he came in with a desire to work and wasn't going to stop until he achieved his goal."

Ron understood that if he could get through the internship, he could get a job on his own, and if he could get a job on his own, then his future was limitless.

Project SEARCH aims for high rates of employment for all participants, ensuring each person is well versed in a wide array of skills needed for the future. Typical rotations of the program include environmental services, guest services and nutrition services. Interns also spend time in a classroom learning additional life skills that will help them on a path to successful employment. One hundred percent of the most recent graduating intern class at the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital has secured employment.

Although Ron had been through difficult events in his life, he gained not only a confidence in his abilities, but also a team of mentors who continue to aid his personal and professional growth. "He came to the program with

everything stacked against him, but his whole demeanor and life has changed as a result of Project SEARCH," said Dana.

When asked what he liked most about his job, Ron was quick to reply that his favorite thing is making his own money. "I never had a job before, this was my first job," he said. "It has been a learning experience."

Ron found a job he loves through hard work and dedication during his internship with Project SEARCH. He speaks highly of the people who helped him get to this place. When asked what he would say to the people who've been part of this experience, he replied, "It has been a long journey, but I would thank them for the opportunity and the connection to the people at Project SEARCH."

Progress currently offers two Project SEARCH locations in Middle Tennessee: Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt and Embassy Suites Nashville. A new program at Amerigroup Nashville will launch in the fall of 2017. For information about any of these programs, please contact Pam Hollingsworth, Co-Director of Employment Programs of Progress, at 615.477.9287.



Project SEARCH Vanderbilt Intern Class 2017

Using the Employment and Community First CHOICES Program: A Parent's Perspective

by Pam VanGilder

When we applied for the Employment and Community First CHOICES (ECF) program in the late fall of 2016, we did not know what to expect nor did we know the opportunities this program would offer our daughter Sarah and our family. Within a few days of applying, Sarah's newly assigned case manager called to set up an appointment.

This turned into a series of two-hour meetings in which she asked many questions, completed many forms and finally sent in our application. Once Sarah was accepted we began working on her person-centered plan. Throughout this planning process, Sarah gradually began to understand that this was her plan, with her interests, choices and goals at the helm. She listened carefully throughout, voiced her opinions and signed each of the many forms as they were completed. This took time, several weeks in fact, which was good because as her parents, Paul and I needed this time to thoughtfully review the plan.

Centered on her interests and abilities, the plan included specific actions of community integration and job-seeking opportunities. We also needed this time for our own transition to begin letting go, to encourage our daughter to make her own choices on a larger scale, and to allow the supports through the ECF program to assist her in following through on her choices. After all, as with our other two children who are now adults, we were raising Sarah to be independent in self-care, thought and action. It was now her turn.

The initial weeks also gave Sarah the time to process this transition. No longer in school with a fixed schedule, what



Sarah and Grace

would her days be like, when would she see her friends and what would she do? I could see she was seriously thinking about it, but she was not yet able to picture exactly how it was going to work, and neither were we. Throughout this process it was clear that Sarah's case manager, Melissa, was part of our new team, listening carefully to our concerns and helping us include them in the plan. As Melissa worked with us with patience and a sense of humor, she got to know Sarah and they developed a warm and friendly relationship.



Sarah at Square Beans Coffee shop

Once the plan was set, Sarah's ECF program began with a personal assistant (PA) for community integration. We chose to work with a local service provider who assigned us a PA. During this transition, Sarah learned the PA was coming to assist her in engaging in community activities, and she had choices to make about what she wanted to do. At first I would make her a list of possibilities, always reminding her she was an adult and she could choose what she wanted and needed to do. Soon she was riding her bike around the block, going to the gym to walk on the treadmill,

making her grocery list and going to the store.

But something was missing; I still had to seek out the opportunities, plan for them and set the wheels in motion. Staffing became inconsistent in personnel and in attendance. We began to reconsider how to make this work for us.

Sarah is very active. She loves theatre - both attending and participating - loves to dance, play basketball, ride her bike

and be constantly on the move. She checks the weekly schedule in the paper and on Choose 901, a news source for local Memphis events, as well as the various programs offered through the Special Education community and plans her week. She needed a personal assistant with similar interests, who would develop a relationship with her and help her with her plan.

We decided the Consumer-Directed process would be a better path for us. In Consumer Direction, we actually hire the people who provide some of Sarah's support services. This means that we have to do the things an employer would typically do, like train, schedule, supervise and even fire the staff that doesn't work out. We are also responsible for managing the services we need within an approved budget.

We had to work quickly. It was almost summer and Sarah was looking forward to assisting at the New Day Children's Theatre Summer Camps, a program she had participated in before she aged out. Although she could just hang out at the camp, I wanted her to have a PA who was experienced in this area and who would be able to recognize what needed to be done and how to help Sarah be a more effective assistant. I was able to hire a college student who was home for the summer. Grace was a family friend, had theatre experience, and had worked with students with disabilities. It was a great match!

After a few days Sarah was waiting on the front porch when Grace arrived. She would tell Grace her itinerary for the day: "first the gym, then lunch, then New Day", and off they would go. We were thrilled that Sarah was spending the day in the community doing something she enjoyed and could contribute to. We were also relieved that we could focus on our own work without interruption.

The best part however was something we hadn't anticipated. At the end of the day Sarah would bounce in the door, happy to see us and eager to tell us about her day. She would chat on and on about her experience before heading up to her room to "chill out" before dinner. Because we were not driving her, or participating with her, because we each had separate experiences each day, there was so much more to talk about when we all came home.

There was a noticeable difference about the way Sarah carried herself and the way she interacted with us. There was a feeling of freedom for all three of us that caught us by surprise.

I realize now that summer was the ideal time to begin the ECF program. The New Day program had a set schedule which Sarah was both familiar with and interested in, and we were fortunate enough to find a personal assistant who met all of our criteria. But we knew Grace was heading back to school at the end of the summer and we would need to find another person to fill her shoes.

We began searching right away as it takes time to find someone and to complete the PA application process. This involved:

- Completing the PA application over the phone
- Waiting for the PA application to be processed and then mailed back to me or the applicant
- Reviewing the application with the applicant to add any necessary information
- The applicant taking a one-hour training over the phone that can only be taken on Fridays from 9:00-10:00.
- Waiting for a background check to be filed and approved
- The applicant obtaining a CPR/First Aid certification

We were fortunate to find not one but two people who could serve as Sarah's personal assistants this year. One is a senior at the University of Memphis who has also worked with the University's Best Buddies program. She is Sarah's primary PA. The other is a neighbor who is also a substitute teacher. Although she only has a few hours to offer us each week she is close and can serve as a back-up when needed.

The greatest challenge has been planning ahead and organizing schedules, but I think we'll get better at it as we go along. So far Sarah's PAs have helped her shop for new clothes, taken her to the theatre, to lunch with friends, to shop for birthday cards for friends, helped her organize her photos into books, and taken her to Next Chapter Book Club meetings. Sarah and her PA are planning to attend an orientation at the Humane Society so they can volunteer one day a week. They will also try out a volunteer position at the local food pantry. All of these activities not only keep Sarah busy, they also help her continue to develop work and communication skills. She enjoys working, serving people and feeling like she is making a contribution to the community. She also enjoys

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CHOICES ... *Continued from page 9*

the independence of doing something on her own, with her buddy to accompany her.

Another part of ECF involves employment. Sarah works one four-hour shift a week at Square Beans, a small coffee shop in Collierville. She wants to work more but at this time they do not have more hours to offer her. She has participated in the Discovery and Exploration Job Program at SRVS, a provider agency in Memphis, and is currently working on Job Advancement and seeking additional employment opportunities through SRVS. Sarah's case manager calls every couple of weeks to check on Sarah's health and progress and to complete new forms as she transitions from and moves through the job search programs. I called her twice with questions and she took care of them within 24 hours.

ECF is still a relatively new program with many obstacles to overcome. Service providers are challenged to find and maintain the number of qualified staff needed to serve the many participants in the program. Under the Consumer-Directed Program, one can do their own search to find a compatible match, but that too can be a challenge.

The application process for the PAs takes a minimum of four to six weeks, which can turn away an employee who may not have that kind of time to wait for a paycheck. The PAs must also have CPR and First Aid training. Scheduling training in a timely manner in order to complete the application process is also challenging. We were encouraged to have more than one PA on file so they can serve as back-ups when needed, and we were fortunate to have found three.

We anticipate Grace will be back at Christmas and in the summer when the other two PAs may not be available. We anticipate the need to stay ahead of the process and always be on the lookout for a possible PA to add to our list in order to avoid gaps in coverage. Our summer PA did not have difficulty collecting her paycheck. However, we are in the second pay period for our next set of PAs and there seems to be a delay in the payment process. Hopefully as the program continues to develop some of these obstacles will be overcome.

In talking with other parents it's apparent the greatest challenge is in finding PAs. We've discussed the possibilities of creating a network of PAs we can all share, providing more work for the PAs who may need more hours than only one person receiving services can offer.



Sarah at University of Memphis with her Best Buddies

We also discussed the possibility of groups of PAs and the people they serve getting together for events, such as gathering at someone's house for a dinner party, a game night or a group walk in the park.

Creating the Person-Centered Plan is the first task that is initially overwhelming. Finding a PA with the personality to work with Sarah and the interest in helping her fulfill her plan was the second major challenge. So far we've been fortunate to find the right people.

Several weeks ago TennCare invited us to a meeting to give feedback. They listened to our concerns and suggestions and hopefully we'll see the results of this meeting as the program evolves.

ECF CHOICES: *For more information or to apply for the Employment and Community First CHOICES program, administered by the Bureau of TennCare and operated by Tennessee's health plans or "managed care organizations" (Amerigroup, Blue Cross Blue Shield, United Healthcare), you can visit TennCare's website (<http://tn.gov/tenncare>) and search for 'Employment and Community First'. TennCare has a "self-referral" form on their website you can fill out on your own to apply for the program.*

Need help applying for ECF CHOICES? *If you have TennCare, call your health plan and ask for help with a self-referral for Employment and Community First CHOICES. The number is on your TennCare card.*

- BlueCare: 888-747-8955
- Amerigroup: 866-840-4991
- United Healthcare Community Plan: 800-690-1606

You can also call your Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Regional Office for help with a self-referral for Employment and Community First CHOICES.

- West Tennessee Regional Office (866) 372-5709
- Middle Tennessee Regional Office (800) 654-4839
- East Tennessee Regional Office (888) 531-9876

Pam VanGilder is a 2013-14 graduate of the Partners in Policymaking program.

New Council Members

Ryan Durham

Ryan Durham lives in Lawrenceburg and represents the South Central Tennessee development district. Ryan is an attorney with Boston, Holt, Sockwell & Durham, PLLC and graduated with a Doctorate of Jurisprudence from the University of Tennessee and a Bachelor of Science from Middle Tennessee State University. He is the Past Chairman of the Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, and has served on the University of Tennessee College of Law Alumni Advisory Board and Legal Clinic Advisory Board.



Gina Summer

Gina Summer lives in Jackson and represents the Southwest Tennessee Development District. She works within the State library system to provide information systems technology support and consultation to public libraries in West Tennessee; through this position, she's received training on assistive technologies and ADA compliance for public libraries. Gina is a 2016-2017 graduate of the Council's Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute and a 2015 graduate of Vanderbilt Kennedy Center's Volunteer Advocacy Project training. She is the parent of a teenage son with autism and is active with Autism Resources of the MidSouth and The Arc MidSouth.



Sarah Kassas

Sarah Kassas lives in Nashville and serves on the Council as a representative of a local non-governmental agency. Sarah works as a Bilingual Information and Referral Coordinator at Tennessee Disability Pathfinder. She has her Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages from the University of Alabama and her Bachelor of Arts in English from American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. She's had extensive experience teaching, mentoring and advising students learning English as a second language, including working as a lecturer at Qatar University and the University of Iowa. One of her main roles at Pathfinder is to provide case management support to immigrant and refugee clients who face language and cultural barriers in accessing disability services and other services they need.



Martez

Williams

Martez Williams lives in Nashville and serves on the Council as an at-large member. He has served on The Arc Davidson County's Family Support Council since 2015. Martez attended Wayne County Community College, Helena Dye School of Cosmetology and Pivot Point Cosmetology School. He worked as a van driver for E & A Solutions, providing transportation to medical appointments for low-income and elderly individuals, as well as individuals with disabilities. He graduated from the Council's Partners in Policymaking program this past spring.



Expanding the Workforce

by Ann Thompson, Director, Workforce Development, Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities leads initiatives statewide to improve disability policies and practices, educates policymakers and the public about promising practices in the field of disability services, and facilitates collaboration and coordination across public and private organizations.

One of our primary goals in the State Plan that guides our work is developing leaders within Tennessee's disability community. Promoting employment opportunities for Tennesseans with disabilities is also an ongoing top priority and commitment.

One strategy we've identified to help achieve this goal is by promoting internships. Over the next five years of our State Plan, we hope to develop various ongoing internship opportunities for people with developmental disabilities within state government and the Tennessee General Assembly, and within organizations that serve people with various disabilities and those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

We believe internships are a great way to let jobseekers with disabilities test out work environments and learn new skills, introduce employers to the talents and strengths of employees with disabilities, and ultimately increase the numbers of Tennesseans with disabilities who are employed.

Prior to working with Lipscomb University IDEAL and Next Steps at Vanderbilt post-secondary education programs for students with disabilities, I think it's fair to say I walked through life without giving much thought to individuals with disabilities. I am naturally friendly and courteous, wanting to help others, but the lack of having individuals in my life who have intellectual or developmental disabilities prevented me from being conscious of the everyday struggles that exist.

I was also unaware of the workforce opportunity this population of potential employees presented.

I am very familiar with the employment needs of industry in Tennessee. Just about every company I speak with in my role at the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD) brings up the talent pipeline and the current shortage of qualified, dependable employees. Thanks to the encouragement of our deputy director and Chief Operating Officer Ted Townsend and partnership with agencies like the Council on Developmental Disabilities, I now have a very different outlook on how our state workforce challenges can benefit from the inclusion of this very capable workforce.



Interns with family members and job coaches

I was given orders to create and implement a TNECD internship for an individual with disabilities. Not knowing where to start, I reached out to Jeremy Norden-Paul, Employment and Day Services Director at the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD), and he, along with the help of the Council on Developmental Disabilities, connected me with the post-secondary programs at Lipscomb and Vanderbilt. After a few more calls, a site visit, and a meeting with potential candidates, I had successfully secured two amazing young women to intern with us. Feeling very proud of my accomplishment, I quickly realized the hardest part was yet to come. I now had to find assignments and manage these young women to ensure they were provided a valuable experience.

This is when I became very nervous. What if they don't like this position? What if I can't count on them? What if they need too much attention? What if they're incapable of performing the duties? What if they don't like me? All of these questions went through my mind until Peach Chinratanalab and Brittenee Whitelow showed up to work for their first day, 15 minutes early.

I was astonished by their abilities and their desire to perform. I was impressed by their drive and willingness to learn. I was overjoyed with their humor and compassion for our team. Most importantly, I was changed and saw these young women as capable instead of disabled.

through Internships

Over the course of the summer, Peach and Brittenee (along with amazing help from their career coaches, Katrina and Hannah), performed research tasks, socialized with the office, met every challenge with a smile and were early to work every single day. I also provided a work-from-home project, knowing that transportation is a large barrier for employment, especially for individuals with disabilities. During those hours, the interns researched and designed a presentation about a barrier to employment they face, and they successfully presented the PowerPoint to our entire team in the large conference room as their capstone project - an incredible feat.

As the summer ended, Peach and Brittenee went back to school, and we did a small exit interview to find out how it went from their perspective. They told me they are more confident in their abilities to be a valued employee. I made

them promise me they would continue to grow. There were hugs and some happy tears.

Now, as I go through my day, I am aware of the lack of ADA compliant restrooms, the lack of elevators, the lack of accessible transportation, and the lack of a pipeline to employment for these individuals. I am committed to doing anything I can to help improve employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and I am confident this untapped workforce is a key component in today's economy. I especially want to challenge others to create a workforce strategy that is inclusive of individuals with disabilities. It may take a little more time to onboard these employees on the front end, but the benefits of dependability, diversity, innovation and high-retention rates are well worth the effort.

Q & A with Interns Brittenee and Peach

Q: What was your favorite part of your internship at TNECD?

Brittenee: "I liked meeting new people and Governor Bill Haslam! I really liked helping people with their work and being part of a team."

Peach: "My favorite part of the internship was getting to know all the people."

Q: What projects did you most enjoy working on?

Brittenee: "My final presentation was fun. I did my research on other programs that work with people with disabilities in Tennessee, and I also learned fun skills about working in an office. I came up with an idea for an iPhone app to scan students' applications, and my boss really liked it."

Peach: "I enjoyed doing the Chamber of Commerce website project and doing the website links. Project 2 was the hardest - it involved putting all the website links on a Google spreadsheet. Also, the presentation I did at the end of the TNECD internship was pretty fun. It was all about transportation for people with disabilities. It covered things like Uber, Lyft and Music City Taxi."

Q: How do you think this experience helped you be better prepared for employment?

Brittenee: "I learned that I need to be more independent and have to stick to my schedule. I also learned how important it is to dress professionally and to speak with my boss and write professionally in emails that I send."

Peach: "I've been interested in office work since I was 14 or about that age - I've always admired office work."

Q: Why do you think internships are important?

Brittenee: "Internships are important as practice for a job in life. I liked being able to practice my skills in the TNECD before I graduate into a different job. I learned a lot from my boss and now I feel more prepared for a job when I graduate from IDEAL in May."

Peach: "Internships are important for people, no matter if they are people with disabilities or not, to give people the opportunity to see if this is a job they want to do. I think we should encourage more people with disabilities to get jobs."

Leadership Academy for Excellence in Disability Services

by **Alicia Cone, PhD, Director of Grant Program, Council on Developmental Disabilities**

The first year of the Leadership Academy for Excellence in Disability Services (LAEDS) is complete! It was a journey of change for the 29 participants across state government selected to be in the inaugural class. This Academy was a dream come true and is a stellar example of what can be accomplished through the combined efforts of multiple state agencies working in agreement and collaborating on a common goal

To refresh everyone's memory, LAEDS is a year-long leadership development program for leaders who work in state government programs that serve Tennesseans with disabilities and their families in any capacity. It is designed to ensure that these agency leaders could begin operating from a shared set of values, goals and principles, and to strengthen commitments to cross-agency collaboration.

Our partner in this project, the Tennessee Department of Human Resources (DOHR) and their Strategic Learning Solutions (SLS) office provided the leadership training expertise and template which allowed this first-ever, cross-agency, discipline-specific leadership academy to be built. DOHR hosts a number of leadership development programs and academies for state employees, including LEAD Tennessee, Tennessee Government Executive Institute, Tennessee Government Management Institute and many department-specific leadership academies.

Most importantly, the Academy was developed with input from the 11 agencies that comprise the LAEDS Executive Leadership Council, an advisory group consisting of senior level government leaders. This team includes Commissioners or high-level leadership from the Departments of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Education, Health, Human Services, Human Resources, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Veteran's Affairs, the Commission on Aging and Disability, the Council on Developmental Disabilities, TennCare and others. The Executive Leadership Council chose the competencies for participants to study related to managing diversity, process management, organizational



LAEDS participants work on a group project

agility, innovation management, and other topics linked to skilled, trustworthy and expert leadership.

Each session addressed one to two leadership competencies. Disability and leadership subject matter experts and Commissioners or departmental leaders spoke at each of the six summits held over the course of the 12 months, and leadership training was based on the focus competencies for that particular Summit. One of the most popular speakers was Dr. Herbert Marbury from Vanderbilt University who spoke on managing diversity, and trust and integrity. During the wrap up, attendees noted that his training caused them to look at their motives and decision-making processes to ensure that their beliefs, actions and words were aligned, in order to exercise and interact with integrity.

Another well-received presenter was Dr. Sheli Reynolds of the University of Missouri, Kansas City – Institute for Human Development, one of the national leaders of the Supporting Families Community of Practice, which Tennessee has participated in over the past five years. Dr. Reynolds talked about the competency of decision quality, driving home the idea that decisions we make today as we guide and support people with disabilities and their family members can have a long-term impact on the course of that person's life. Those decisions can set a person on a positive or negative life trajectory, and, if the decisions



The LAEDS first graduating class

are policy-related, they may well be guiding services that impact thousands of people for decades.

When surveyed, the majority of participants believed that the Academy both increased their leadership skills and enhanced their knowledge of the unique leadership competencies required when working with Tennesseans with disabilities and their families.

Beyond learning leadership skills, several reported that the Academy taught them to listen more, and to work on developing staff, rather than just managing them. They also discovered that leadership requires constant and continuous improvement and the acquisition of new strategies. One said, "Leadership starts from within. There is a tendency to focus on others immediately. However, knowing yourself – your skills, abilities, strengths, areas to improve (and acknowledging these and doing something about it) - is the key to leadership."

Moving forward, there will be two additional components in the next Academy. The first is "Opportunity with a Master", which will provide participants the chance to hear from industry experts on a variety of different topics that have been identified through a survey of the Academy's Executive Leadership Council. The second is the addition of small team projects that will allow participants to apply



Presenter Alan Bergman addresses the class

skills they are learning in the Academy to real life issues identified by the Executive Leadership Council.

Continuing to implement this Leadership Academy has required the time, energy, expertise and commitment of many partners across Tennessee state government. This Academy is providing participants with a shared set of consistent values, and teaching participants to work across departmental lines. The Council on Developmental Disabilities strongly believes this will decrease barriers to services, and provide important long-term benefits to Tennesseans with disabilities and their families by improving their experiences with all state services.

Transition Tennessee: A Blueprint for Student Success in Charting the Path Forward

by Erik Carter, Rachael Jenkins & Shimul Gajjar

Helping students transition well to adulthood is a primary purpose of special education. It is the reason we invest so much in providing students with disabilities an exceptional educational experience. Right at the outset of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act*, this overarching purpose is stated as follows:

“...to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and *prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living...*” (italics added by author)

Collective investment across many years of schooling should help students with disabilities transition to meaningful work, enable lifelong learning and contribute to a good life in their community. There is no limit to what students can accomplish when provided the right combination of thoughtful planning, good instruction, strong supports, individualized opportunities and high expectations.

We have created a unique online resource designed to equip educators all across our state to provide exceptional transition services and supports for students with disabilities. *Transition Tennessee* (www.transitiontn.org) is a free professional development portal that brings together in one place the very best of what we know works for promoting successful transitions for students with disabilities. It describes the steps we can take as educators - in partnership with families, communities and service system agencies - to help students identify, work toward and achieve their post-school goals. It brings together best and recommended practices in our field. And it offers a results-oriented framework to equip educators with the knowledge, resources and evidence-based practices that promote collaboration and produce students ready for postsecondary success.

Presently, we have developed five courses focused on:

- Guiding Principles for Transition
- Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment

- High-Quality Transition Planning
- Pathways to Employment
- Supports and Partnerships

Each of these courses contains a rich array of strategies, resources and ideas to support our state in this very important work. Short, engaging lessons focus on best practices related to each topic. Case studies illustrate how these practices might be implemented with students. Videos demonstrate how these practices are being applied across the state. Downloadable resources provide helpful tools for carrying out this work.

Three new courses have recently been added to this site:

- Pathways to Community Life
- Pathways to Postsecondary Education
- Pathways to Self-Determination

Pathways to Community Life will include seven lessons covering how teachers can prepare students for independent living and community involvement after high school. Individual lessons in this course will cover residential living and daily living skills, financial literacy skills, social skills and transportation skills. Each lesson will include practical illustrations of how to teach these skill areas within the classroom, at home and in the community. Two additional lessons in this course focus on specific instructional strategies and community-based instruction.

Pathways to Postsecondary Education lays out practical steps for preparing students with disabilities for further education, with lessons covering diploma options, planning for postsecondary education, inclusive higher education options for students with intellectual disabilities, and community colleges, vocational technical schools and traditional four-year colleges.

As students move through adolescence and into adulthood, we usually expect them to assume much greater responsibility for managing their own learning, relationships and behavior. As a society, we have not always viewed people with disabilities as capable of making important decisions for themselves or as knowing what they need. The Pathways

to Self-Determination course will include six lessons aimed at helping teachers provide instruction, supports and opportunities to amplify their students' voices. Lessons will cover self-advocacy, self-management, choice making and decision making, problem solving and supported decision-making.

Beginning in November of 2017, Vanderbilt is entering into a five-year partnership with the Department of Education. This partnership will expand upon the current online courses to include live training, technical assistance and professional development. Webinars and a monthly e-newsletter will provide additional avenues for educators and other stakeholders to learn how to implement best practices in transition.

Transition Tennessee can be accessed at www.transitiontn.org. Although the website is free, it does require registration. And while we place a Tennessee accent on all of the content, the website will also be a valuable resource for educators across the country. We also invite parents, advocates, service

providers and others to access this resource.

Transition Tennessee is a partnership between the Tennessee Department of Education, Vanderbilt University's Department of Special Education and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. We invite your feedback and suggestions as we strive to improve the quality and relevance of this resource.

Erik Carter, PhD is a professor in the Department of Special Education at Vanderbilt University and a member of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. His research and teaching focuses on evidence-based strategies for supporting access to the general curriculum and promoting valued roles in school, work and community settings for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, autism and multiple disabilities.

Rachael Jenkins, MA is an educational consultant with Vanderbilt University. She graduated from George Washington University in 2012 with a degree in rehabilitation counseling and worked in the Washington, DC public vocational rehabilitation system prior to her work with Vanderbilt.

Shimul Gajjar, MEd is an educational consultant with Vanderbilt University. She graduated with her Master's in special education from Vanderbilt in 2016.

Addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences: *A Case for Attention and Action in Tennessee*

by **Linda O'Neal, Executive Director, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth**

The future prosperity of any society depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation. When Tennessee invests wisely in children and families, the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship.

The early years of life matter because the basic architecture of the human brain is constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Like the construction of a home, the building process begins with laying the foundation, framing the rooms and wiring the electrical system in a predictable sequence. Early experiences literally shape how the brain gets built, establishing either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows. A strong foundation in the early years increases the probability of positive outcomes. A weak foundation increases the odds of later difficulties, and getting things right the first time is easier than trying to fix them later.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can harm the developing brains and bodies of children, compromising the foundation for lifelong health. Research on ACEs has resulted in child abuse and neglect being acknowledged as a major public health problem and a leading cause of early death. From academic failure to alcoholism, from crime to cancer, presence of ACEs compromise the safety, tax dollars and quality of life for all Tennesseans. Understanding research about ACEs deepens professional knowledge across sectors and creates a common language for collectively addressing community challenges.

The interactive influences of genes and experience shape the developing brain. The active ingredient is the "serve and return" relationships children have with their parents and other caregivers in their family or community. Like the process of serve and return in games such as tennis and volleyball, young children naturally reach out for interaction. This process starts in infancy – with facial expressions and babbling – and continues throughout the early years. If adults do not respond by getting in

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Addressing ACEs ... *Continued from page 17*

sync, the child's learning process is incomplete. This has negative implications for later learning. But when children develop in an environment of relationships that are rich in responsive, back-and-forth interactions, these brain-building experiences establish a sturdy architecture on which future learning is built.

Just as a rope needs every strand to be strong and flexible, child development requires support and experiences that weave many different capacities together. Cognitive, emotional and social capacities are tightly connected in the brain. Language acquisition, for example, relies on hearing, the ability to differentiate sounds, and the ability to pay attention and engage in social interaction. Science therefore directs us away from debating which kinds of skills children need most, and toward the realization that they are all intertwined.

Science also points us to pay attention to factors that can disrupt the developmental periods that are times of intense brain construction, because when this activity is derailed, it can lead to lifelong difficulties in learning, memory and cognitive function. Stress is an important factor to consider. Everyday challenges, like learning to get along with new people or in new environments, set off a temporary stress response that helps children be more alert while learning new skills. But truly adverse childhood experiences – severely negative experiences such as the loss of a parent through illness, death or incarceration; abuse or neglect; or witnessing violence or substance abuse – can lead to a toxic stress response in which the body's stress systems go on "high alert" and stay there. This haywire stress response releases harmful chemicals into the brain that impair cell growth and make it harder for neurons to form healthy connections, damage the brain's developing architecture and increase the probability of poor outcomes. This exaggerated stress response also affects health, and is linked to chronic physical diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.

Science tells us that many children's futures are undermined when stress damages the early brain architecture. But the good news is that potentially toxic stressors can be made tolerable if children have access to stable, responsive adults – home visitors, child care providers, teachers, coaches, mentors. The presence of good serve-and-return acts as a physical buffer that lessens the biological impact of severe stress.

The factors children are exposed to affect how well they progress, and communities play a big role. A child's wellbeing is like a scale with two sides; one end can get loaded with positive things, while the other end can get loaded with negative things. Supportive relationships with adults, sound nutrition and quality early learning are all stacked on the positive side. Stressors such as witnessing violence, neglect or other forms of toxic stress are stacked on the other. This dynamic system shows us two ways we can achieve positive child outcomes: to tip to the positive side, we can pile on the positive experiences, or we can offload weights from the negative side. Children who have experienced several ACEs are carrying a heavy negative load, and to tip these children toward the positive, innovative states and communities have been able to design high-quality programs for children to prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences whenever possible, and respond to them with strong, nurturing supports to ameliorate their impact when they can't be prevented. These programs have solved problems in early childhood development and shown significant long-term improvement for children.

As Tennesseans understand the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences, they will realize the future economic development and prosperity of the state depends on what we do now to prevent these experiences whenever possible and to wrap services around children and families when they can't be prevented. There will be better collaboration across disciplines, departments, agencies and communities, and focus on the infrastructure of services and supports that make a difference. When child abuse and domestic violence prevention, home visiting, mental health and substance abuse services for parents, and a variety of other services and supports are available for early intervention, they put in place a preventive system that improves serve-and-return before it breaks down. This kind of sound investment in our society's future is confirmed by brain science. It improves outcomes for children now, and is a significant foundation for solutions to many of the long-standing and nagging challenges we face as a state in our health, mental health, social services, child protection, and juvenile and criminal justice systems.

All children need someone in their corner. The shift from "What is wrong with you, or why are you a problem?" to "What has happened to you, and how we can we support you and help you overcome these experiences?" will result in a more effective, more empathetic service delivery system and a stronger Tennessee.

New Staff at TennCare Focus on Community Engagement for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

by **TennCare Staff**

Dr. Lisa Mills

In September, Dr. Lisa Mills joined the Bureau of TennCare as deputy chief of the Division of Long-Term Supports. Dr. Mills previously served as a consultant, first to the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) and then to TennCare. While she is new to her job at TennCare, she is not new to the long-term services and supports systems in Tennessee. Dr. Mills played an instrumental role in designing the Employment and Community First CHOICES (ECF) program and in designing pending changes to advance gainful employment and community inclusion in the Intellectual Disability Medicaid Waiver programs that are jointly administered by TennCare and DIDD.

Dr. Mills brings with her 28 years of experience in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities, including working as a consultant in 20 states and an eight-year tenure in Scotland (1990-1998), working on the closure of institutions, the establishment of community-based services, person-centered planning and self-advocacy. She also brings the experience of using managed care to deliver long-term services and supports, including in her home state of Wisconsin, which has used a managed care model since 2000.

Dr. Mills is passionately committed to individuals with disabilities being valued members of our communities and advancing opportunities for service systems to better support and facilitate communities welcoming and including individuals with disabilities, rather than service systems acting as substitute communities. She sees the number one challenge as overcoming the low expectations that people with disabilities so commonly face, and sometimes come to adopt themselves, because we have been reluctant to see and invest in the potential that every individual possesses.

Lisa is the parent of two adopted sons, including one who receives special education services. She is a past board member and public policy advisor for the



Dr. Lisa Mills with her two adopted sons.

national disability advocacy organization TASH, and she also previously served as a senior technical advisor and Ruderman Foundation Fellow for the National Coalition to Promote Self-Determination.

Shannon Nehus

Shannon Nehus has joined TennCare as its LTSS (Long-Term Services and Supports) program director for IDD (intellectual and developmental disabilities) and ECF Services. She has over 25 years of experience working with people with IDD. Most recently, she was the executive director of the provider agency Waves, Inc. in Franklin, Tennessee, providing supports to children and adults with IDD through a vision of an inclusive community where everyone works, learns and plays together.



Shannon Nehus

Nehus has served on numerous boards, councils and coalitions, including the State of Tennessee IDD Legislative Task Force; TennCare State Leadership Group; Leadership Wilson; Children, Youth and Families at Risk Coalition; Wilson County Parents as Teachers Board, Williamson County United Way Board; University of Tennessee State Extension Advisory Council; and the Tennessee Disability Megaconference Program Committee. She has a Master of Science degree in educational psychology from Tennessee Tech University.

Nehus is committed to empowering individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to progress toward their full potential. "I am excited to be in my new role as the TennCare IDD long-term services director," said Nehus. "This is a huge opportunity to be able to impact change and to bring to the table my 25 years of experience as a provider of services. I appreciate the opportunity to work with the statewide community of health plans, families, members, provider agencies and multiple state agencies to focus on person-centered supports, employment and all things community inclusion.

"There are many opportunities to take advantage of - especially with a national focus on employment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities," she continued. "I'm excited to be working with Patti Killingsworth, Lisa Mills and the great team at TennCare, and look forward to what we can accomplish."

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