

SPRING 2024



# THE CONNECTION

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ARC TENNESSEE



## Bridge to Success

BY HEATHER HENDERSON

The Arc Tennessee Advocates often have families and individuals that reach out to us looking for support and resources because they feel unprepared for the future. This can include reasons such as seeking further education, employment, or independent living in the community. This is why we were excited to be a part of the Bridge to Success conference. Bridge to Success was a one-day conference hosted by The Arc Tennessee held in April, 2024. The conference provided an opportunity for advocates, educators, and families to gather to learn from one another and learn from experts in the field. The conference created a platform for increasing knowledge, fostering collaboration, and driving progress within the disability community.

The Advocacy team understands the importance of starting early in teaching self-determination and how to advocate for yourself. We were excited Chris Ulmer was able to join as the keynote speaker to share his story of how he helps others find their voices to share their stories. He often does this by asking people the simple question, "What do you want people to know about you?". It's a simple question, but it has the power to help people really understand and be aware of the wide array of capabilities of

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROBBIE FAULKNER  
WELCOMES CONFERENCE ATTENDEES

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## On A Mission

### A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In the new year, The Arc Tennessee staff has been working diligently to fulfill its mission to empower individuals with IDD and their families. Across the state, we have supported and advocated in the homes of those we serve, in schools, and in the halls of Cordell Hull. On February 28th, we joined self-advocates and other organizations for Disability Day on the Hill, and this month we were on our nation's Capitol Hill making our voices and those of the disability community heard. During this legislative session, I have witnessed the power of stories, and the determination of this community to advocate and fight for those we serve and for those who will never know but will lead better lives because of it. What an honor.

Finally, thank you to Karen Downer for her constant support of me and our entire staff during her tenure as Board President. Fortunately, she will be staying on as Past President, so we will continue to be better because of her influence and leadership.

*-Robbie Faulkner*

## Thank you!

The Arc Tennessee was supported by a number of organizations in our recent Light Up A Life silent auction fundraiser. We appreciate all the generous support, but with the pivot to an online auction, we were not able to properly highlight the works of two local artists who graciously donated to the event. The bidding participants who went home with the donated pieces have commented on their joy to have these works in their homes. We greatly appreciate the support of Grace Goad and Kimberly Daniel and encourage our readers to visit their online galleries. Below you will find examples of their work along with the web address to view their work.



Grace Goad, Artist  
<https://gracegoad.com>



Kimberly Daniel, Artist  
<https://www.kimberlydanielart.com/works>





## Bridge to Success continued

those with disabilities. It also shows people with the same diagnosis are unique from one another..

Other highlights included Kevin Wright with Vocational Rehabilitation telling his story about life before IDEA and how it was his self-determination and support from others who believed he could do more that made a difference in his life. Over lunch, we also enjoyed hearing Allison Gauld encourage the 175 participants and exhibitors to believe people are capable of great things and growth. We are thankful to our sponsors and everyone who helped The Arc TN make this conference a success, and we hope it brings us a step closer to supporting individuals and families throughout Tennessee.



THE INAUGURAL BRIDGE TO SUCCESS CONFERENCE BROUGHT 175 PEOPLE TOGETHER TO LEARN AND NETWORK





# Transition Services Tour: Tennessee Rehabilitation Center

BY BREANNA ATWELL

Hello Arc Tennessee family!

My name is Breanna Atwell, and I am the Transition Coordinator with The Arc Tennessee. In my role I help students with disabilities and their families understand the transition process from middle school to high school and then into adulthood.

Currently we are in what I like to call “transition season.” This is when students with disabilities will be moving to the next grade level, moving on from middle to high school, graduating, jumping into employment, or just planning their next step in life.

With transition, there comes so many questions of what to do, what plans need to be made, what goals the student wants to achieve in the upcoming school year or after graduation, and where can students and families find resources.

This year I was able to tour the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) in Smyrna, Tennessee, which is an amazing resource for young adults to obtain employment skills and training after leaving high school! My goal while visiting TRC was to give students and families a glimpse of what this program looks like.

TRC is a state-operated training center that provides individuals with disabilities career and technical education to allow greater independence and competitive integrated employment within an individual’s local community. TRC is a program of the Tennessee Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. To be eligible, students must have a referral from Vocational Rehabilitation. This program is 100% free for students!

Students eligible for the TRC program have ten areas of study to choose from. This includes:

- Automotive Services Technology
- Business Education Technology
- Certified Logistics Technician
- Certified Nursing Assistant
- Certified Production Technician
- Childcare Worker
- Custodial Technician
- Customer Service
- Food Service
- Pharmacy Technician



BREANNA ATWELL, TRANSITION COORDINATOR WITH THE ARC TENNESSEE, VISITS TENNESSEE REHABILITATION CENTER IN SMYRNA, TN. PICTURED, SHE VISITS THE PHARMACY TECHNICIAN TRAINING AREA.



## Local Chapter Updates

Activities and information from our local chapters

### THE ARC CUMBERLAND COUNTY

The Arc of Cumberland Valley started 2024 with the theme of “A Year of Giving” on Saturday, January 13, as we recognized MLK Day of Service. We had a presentation on homelessness in our community and made “goodie bags” for each member to keep in the car to distribute to the homeless throughout the community. Members really embraced the project and many have made their own goodie bags to keep in the car once they gave away the bags made by the group.

Each month the group is learning about needs in the community and adopting a local organization to provide some loving care.

We also hosted our annual Valentine’s Dance on Saturday, February 17th. We had 120 members and families in attendance.



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### DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES OF DICKSON COUNTY

DSDC and Dickson County Schools Department of Special Education hosted their second annual Transition Fair in February. [Destination ... Life](#) was supported by 20 transition-related organizations and attended by 30 families along with several educators and members of the community. An updated Transition Booklet was created for the event and to be shared in transition IEP meetings over the next year. DSDC and SDCBL had another successful year of Basketball!!!!!!







## Local Chapter Updates continued

### THE ARC WILLIAMSON COUNTY

The Arc Williamson County recently hosted a virtual event, “Overview of Federal and State Programs for People with IDD.” They discussed topics including Social Security, TennCare, ECF Waiver, TEIS, Katie Beckett, and more. The discussion was led by their Executive Director, Katy Clouse.

They also hosted “Financial, Future, and Estate Planning Seminar” that included speakers Luke Bottorff, Attorney, and Matt Moser, Financial Planner. The event was hosted at their office in Franklin.

### THE ARC HICKMAN COUNTY

The Arc Hickman County has been so very festive! Last fall, they hosted a Fall Festival where they had chili, games, and special singing was enjoyed by all! They also hosted a Christmas party that featured pizza, gifts from Santa, and singing and games. Valentine’s Day was celebrated by many cards being sent to special friends. Two baskets of goodies and cards were also sent to their PDI homes.







## Transition Tour continued

As I toured the campus, I met with instructors from each program. Each program has a specific building or location where the students will go for their classes. Students will also be able to have hands-on experience from their locations. For example, the automotive students have a fully-functioning automotive technician garage that will allow students to work on cars, change oil, and perform various other car maintenance. The pharmacy students even have a mock CVS store that they can work in!

Students have the option to attend classes during the day and go home or stay in the dorms! Students who choose to stay in the dorms will be given a roommate. TRC also provides students with recreational activities on and off campus to allow students social opportunities with other students. While enrolled in the program, students will have various support professionals to assist them. This includes case managers, psychology services, first-aid center with registered nurses and licensed practical nurses, physical and occupational therapist to assist the student in gaining specific job movement skills, dorm monitors, and professionals certified in the various programs of study. Once a student completes their program, they will receive a certificate in their area of study and Vocational Rehabilitation will assist them in finding employment.

I had so much fun touring the campus, meeting the staff, and getting a glimpse of what TRC can do for those with disabilities! If you are interested or want to learn more, you can contact TRC and take a tour for yourself.

I hope to bring more transition service tours to you in the future. Happy transition season, students!

## Local Chapter Updates continued

### THE ARC OF THE GREAT SMOKIES

The Arc of the Great Smokies held a Trunk or Treat event last Fall alongside Best Buddies, Maryville College. Everyone in attendance had a great time!





## People First Update

BY FRANK MEEUWIS

Well, we did it! People First officially participated in our first conference in 2024 with the exclusive Entrepreneur Expo on Thursday, April 4, 2024 at the Franklin Marriott Cool Springs!

I was honored to meet our Davidson County chapter President Madam “Peach” Chinratanalab’s mother when she came in with Peach, and this was the first time that I met Peach in person! (She is the same spunky, bright-eyed, headstrong advocate that I am so used to seeing only through a ZOOM meeting window on my computer!) Peach was dressed very smartly and came to the Expo at the Franklin Marriott to help me promote our People First organization in Tennessee! We enjoyed meeting people—from parents with their kids to other professionals and teachers who had come to the Expo the night before the Bridge To Success conference. For a couple hours, we passed out brochures and other materials, and just chatted about nothing in particular... just having fun (and eating fresh-baked cookies on offer) in a room with other people who were all having conversations and learning about local small businesses where entrepreneurs served families and children with special learning needs!

It was a bit of a bummer that the excitable Joey Williams and his mom Alice had to cancel... but an ill-feeling Joey wouldn’t be the same! That’s okay—now he’ll have the time to finish some of his self-built and hand-painted birdhouses for the next opportunity! And I felt accomplished because, not only did I meet Peach’s mom and dad when they came to get her, but I had succeeded in getting my friend Peach out on her own and into the big-wide world that is our community! We got to know each other better, while we made sure each person left with materials, brochures, contact info, and most importantly—ideas and examples for successful opportunities for meaningful contributions to the community!

SCAN TO JOIN OR  
RENEW YOUR  
MEMBERSHIP TO  
PEOPLE FIRST TN



HAL BAKER, BILLY WORSHAM, FRANK MEEUWIS, GARRETT JONES  
AND PEACH CHINRATANALAB WORK THE PEOPLE FIRST TABLE AT  
THE ENTREPRENEUR EXPO EVENT IN EARLY APRIL







## Family Engagement Update

BY JEN FISHER

The Family Engagement in Special Education team has been busy the last few months. In addition to the inaugural Bridge to Success Conference, the team has hosted and attended more than 50 events this year providing resources and training to educators and families involved in special education and schools across Tennessee.

In addition, Family Engagement specialists are currently holding Community of Practice presentations in the eight regions across the state. About half have already taken place and the others are scheduled for the coming weeks. Educators and administrators are invited to network and learn more about the Family Engagement project and the Tennessee Technical Assistance Network (TN-TAN). Certificates of attendance are available for these trainings!



SUSAN CARR PRESENTS AT OUR RECENT BRIDGE TO SUCCESS CONFERENCE HELD IN EARLY APRIL

Our team will also be hosting Special Education Advocacy Networking Groups (SPEDANG) in the next several weeks. Representatives from local advocacy groups who work with school aged children involved in special education are invited to engage in open and informal dialogue related to special education in Tennessee. A representative for the Department of Education will be in attendance to give an update and answer questions. Feedback gathered during these events is shared with the state.

We look forward to seeing you at one of our events soon! For more information about Family Engagement events in your area, please visit <https://familyengagementtn.com/events/>.



**FAMILY ENGAGEMENT  
IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**



Building Connections, Capacity, and Student Success. **TN** Department of Education



SCAN TO VISIT THE  
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT  
IN SPECIAL EDUCATION  
WEBSITE



THE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TEAM ATTENDS THE BRIDGE TO SUCCESS CONFERENCE





# Disability Day on the Hill 2024 Recap

BY ASHLEY COULTER

This year's Disability Day on the Hill was another success! On February 28th, self-advocates, family members, and professionals met in downtown Nashville at Cordell Hull to influence legislators on issues they felt were important in their lives. There was also an Advocacy Panel where individuals who saw a need were proactive and assisted with creating a new piece of legislation. These presenters were ultimately successful in having their bills passed, which created positive change for people with disabilities. Attendees had opportunities to go to committee meetings where legislators discussed bills they were considering voting on. If you want to stay connected on public policy issues The Arc Tennessee is following, please email [gdillinger@thearctn.org](mailto:gdillinger@thearctn.org).



JOEY WILLIAMS, ALONG WITH HIS MOTHER, ALICE WILLIAMS, MET WITH JOEY'S REPRESENTATIVE, CLARK BOYD



ASHLEY COULTER AND HEATHER HENDERSON TOOK A PHOTO BETWEEN COMMITTEE MEETINGS



FRANK MEEUWIS MET WITH HIS REPRESENTATIVE, AFTYN BEHN





## Donor Appreciation

Donations are greatly appreciated and help The Arc Tennessee continue to deliver advocacy, information and support to people with disabilities and their families. Many thanks to our donors who contributed between December 16, 2023 through April 17, 2024.

### IN MEMORY OF CHRIS PANVINI, SON OF DORIA PANVINI:

ELISE MCMILLAN  
 GLENDA BOND  
 JANET SHOUSE  
 THE ARC TENNESSEE STAFF

WILLIAM EDWARDS  
 ELIZABETH MULKEY  
 DANA STEPHENSON  
 CARRIE HOBBS-GUIDEN  
 ASHLEY COULTER  
 FRANK MEEUWIS  
 GRAEME HUFFMAN  
 CHARLES HOBBS  
 JAMES FOX  
 LINDA MOORE  
 ASHLEY OBERSTEADT  
 INGRID MOODY

### IN MEMORY OF MINDY MCDOWELL, SISTER OF KAREN DOWNER:

GLENDA BOND  
 THE ARC TENNESSEE STAFF

With your support The Arc Tennessee is leading the fight for equality and inclusion, empowering people to live the lives they want, and inspiring a nationwide movement of advocates. With your help, we grow stronger. To donate on our website, scan the QR code shown here.



THE ARC TENNESSEE STAFF WITH BRIDGE TO SUCCESS KEYNOTE SPEAKER, CHRIS ULMER

Spring 2024



**The Arc**<sup>TM</sup>

*Tennessee*

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Visit [www.thearctn.org](http://www.thearctn.org) or scan the QR code to see if there is a local chapter in your area. You can join through your local chapter or as an at-large member of The Arc TN! If you have questions, please email [membership@thearctn.org](mailto:membership@thearctn.org).



You can also complete the form below and mail to:  
The Arc Tennessee, 545 Mainstream Drive, Suite 100, Nashville, TN 37228

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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Check all that apply:

**Enroll me as a member** (please circle: \$5 Self-Advocate, \$15 Individual, \$25 Family)

**Please accept this donation** (in honor of \_\_\_\_\_)

**Make check payable to The Arc Tennessee or call  
615-248-5878 ext: 317 to process membership dues or make a donation by phone.**