

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

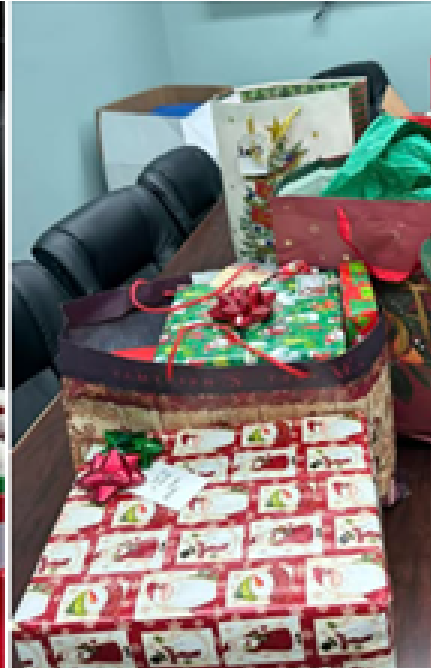
# BUFFALO RIVER

SERVICES, INC.



Buffalo River Services, Inc.

CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED BY: BREANNA JOHNSON.



## DECEMBER 2024

The Wayne County Civitan Club has once again blessed our BRS homes in Waynesboro with a wonderful Christmas gift for everyone we serve! Club members, along with WCB employees from various branches and Linda Crews, a former Civitan member, all contributed by purchasing these thoughtful gifts. They also created individual Christmas stockings filled with goodies for everyone in the homes, with Bailey Burcham Daniel lending a helping hand in preparing the stockings. A huge thank you to each and every one of you for your generosity and kindness!



BUFFALO RIVER SERVICES, INC.

Serving our communities for over 50 years!



(931) 722-5401 | WWW.BRSTN.ORG | 410 OLD HOG CREEK RD. WAYNESBORO, TN 38485

## Season's Greetings from Buffalo River Services, Inc.!

As the year ends, we want to **take a moment to express our heartfelt gratitude to all our stakeholders—our clients, partners, employees, and community.** Your trust, support, and collaboration have been the foundation of our success, and we are truly grateful for the role you play in our journey.

This holiday season, we **celebrate the spirit of togetherness, kindness, and hope.** May your days be filled with warmth, joy, and cherished moments with loved ones.

As we look forward to a new year, we are inspired by the opportunities ahead and **remain committed to serving you with excellence, integrity, and care.**

From all of us at Buffalo River Services, Inc., we wish you a Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and a New Year filled with peace, prosperity, and happiness.

Warmest regards,  
Buffalo River Services, Inc.



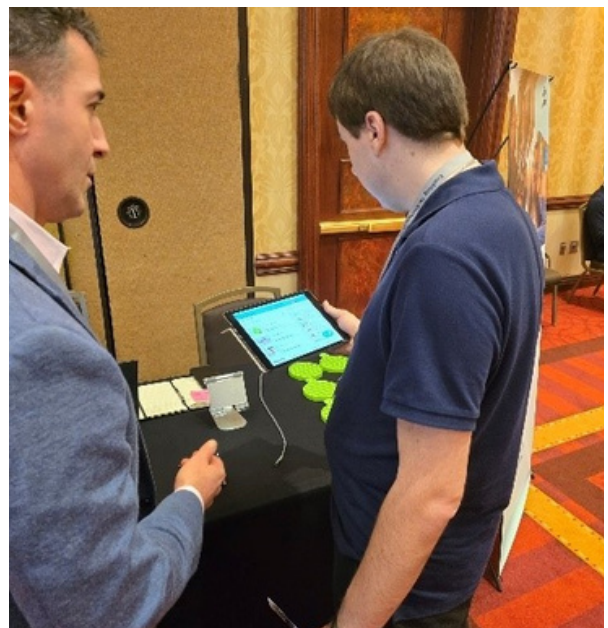


## Local Leader Shines at Technology Summit

**Nick, the dynamic president of Volunteer State People First** and a proud affiliate of Buffalo River Services Arc, **recently showcased his leadership** at the Department of Disability and Aging's (DDA) annual Enabling Technology and Innovation Summit. Representing his community, Nick embraced the opportunity to learn, engage, and advocate for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

Thanks to a **Tech Summit Travel Assistance Grant** from the DDA, Nick's registration and travel expenses were fully covered. This grant, designed to support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) or older adults, ensures participants are well-prepared for the event, receive necessary support during their experience, and have opportunities to reflect on and share the insights gained afterward.

**Nick was joined by Matthew Lineberry**, Vice President of Innovations for Buffalo River Services Arc. Together, they represented their organization, managed an informational booth, and explored new technologies and innovations to enhance the lives of people with disabilities.







## Local Leader Shines at Technology Summit

**Nick's enthusiasm and dedication stood out at the Summit,"** said Lineberry. "He not only represented our organization with pride but also absorbed valuable knowledge about how technology can empower individuals with disabilities."

After a full day of learning and networking, Nick celebrated his hard work with a well-deserved steak dinner.

Nick reflected on the experience, sharing, "It was an incredible experience. I learned so much and had a great time representing Volunteer State People First. I'm excited to bring these ideas back to my community!"

This experience **highlights the importance of grants like the DDA's Tech Summit Travel Assistance Grant** in fostering participation from passionate individuals like Nick, who are committed to making a difference in their communities. With leaders like Nick, the future of advocacy and innovation looks bright for the Volunteer State.







## **BUFFALO RIVER SERVICES FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM:**

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The Family Support Program is designed to **assist individuals with a severe or developmental disability and their families to remain together in their homes and communities.** Family Support is funded by state dollars.

### **THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM IS TO SUPPORT:**

Families with children with severe or developmental **disabilities, school age and younger.** Adults with severe or developmental disabilities who choose to live with their families or who are residing in the community in an unsupported setting (not a state or federally funded program).

### **SERVICES CAN INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:**

**Respite care, day care services, home modifications, equipment, supplies, personal assistance, transportation, homemaker services, housing costs, health-related needs, nursing, and counseling.** Services are flexible and responsive to families and their needs.

### **BRS FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM COVERS THE FOLLOWING COUNTIES:**

**Maury, Lawrence, Giles, Perry,  
Lewis, Hickman & Wayne**

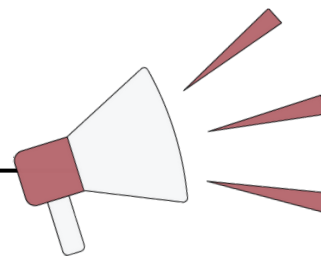
**For additional information or to apply contact:  
Melissa Brewer - (931) 253-2306  
[melissa.brewer@brstn.org](mailto:melissa.brewer@brstn.org)**





## Important Message!!

### NEWS



## MEDICAID AND SNAP ARE IN DANGER

### ACT NOW TO PROTECT AMERICA'S SAFETY NET!

#### What?

In January, Congress will move quickly to adopt deep tax cuts promised by President Trump. To pay for those tax cuts, they intend to slash Medicaid ("TennCare" in Tennessee) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as "food stamps"). If they do, it will shred these vital safety net programs.

#### When?

A budget plan will be adopted in the early part of 2025, possibly as early as January. But leaders are already developing the plan right now. If that budget includes cuts to Medicaid and SNAP as leaders plan, Congress will likely cripple those programs and use the savings to pay for the big tax cuts.

#### The Impact?

One in five Tennesseans relies on Medicaid (TennCare) for health care and for protection from medical bankruptcy. This includes half of all Tennessee children, nearly two-thirds of Tennesseans in nursing homes, and half of pregnant mothers. Medicaid is a lifeline for the most medically fragile children and adults in Tennessee. It is the principal source of funding for rural health care and drug and mental health treatment and prevention. Any cuts to Medicaid will damage our communities, impact every part of our state budget and weaken Tennessee's economy.

SNAP ("food stamps") is the most effective anti-hunger program in the U.S., and every dollar of benefits stimulates between \$1.50 and \$1.80 in economic growth. Nearly three out of four SNAP households are families with children. Cuts to SNAP would harm families who rely on the program, and the state economy.

#### Action Steps

Action steps NOW: Phone or email Senator Marsha Blackburn and Senator Bill Hagerty and your other members of Congress TODAY. Politely tell them that you stand with the 71% of voters who want to maintain Medicaid as it is, and the majority of voters who want to maintain SNAP. Respectfully ask them to make sure Congress **protects Medicaid and SNAP:**

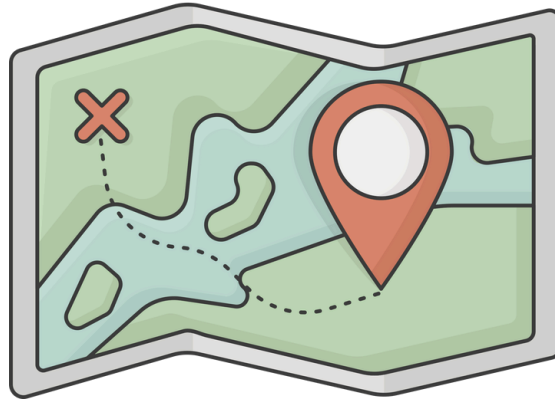
**Sen. Marsha Blackburn**  
**Phone: (202)224-3344**  
**Email: [info@marshablackburn.com](mailto:info@marshablackburn.com)**

**Sen. Bill Hagerty**  
**Phone: (202) 224-4944**  
**Email: <https://www.hagerty.senate.gov/email-me/>**

**To contact your Member of Congress (House of Representatives):**  
**<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>**



Updated: 12/11/2024



## Medicaid Alternative Pathways (MAPs) is Thriving!

Over the past year, we've been **excited to see the continued development and growth of our newest program**, Medicaid Alternative Pathways (MAPs). As mentioned in previous updates, MAPs is designed to empower individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) by providing them with the skills, tools, and support needed to lead more independent and fulfilling lives.

**MAPs focuses on helping participants develop essential life skills** that will allow them to pursue employment, live independently, engage with their communities, and explore hobbies aligned with their interests. With personalized support, enabling technology, and valuable resources, participants are given the opportunity to reach the goals they've set for themselves.

The program is **open to individuals with an I/DD diagnosis who have graduated from high school** or are on track to graduate within three years. For those not currently eligible for other state programs, MAPs offers a fantastic opportunity to begin their journey toward independence and personal growth.

In 2024, MAPs has experienced remarkable growth, more than doubling in size! We've celebrated numerous milestones with our participants this year, including:

- **Obtaining driver's licenses and permits**
- **Securing their first jobs**
- **Pursuing post-secondary education opportunities**
- **Using enabling technology to enhance independence at home**
- **Learning essential life skills, such as cooking**



## Medicaid Alternative Pathways (MAPs) is Thriving!

Looking ahead, we are excited to set a goal for even further expansion in the coming year. **Our aim is to double the program size once again** and extend our service area to new counties and communities. We are also thrilled to announce plans to add a new support position in the coming weeks, which will accelerate MAPs' growth even further.

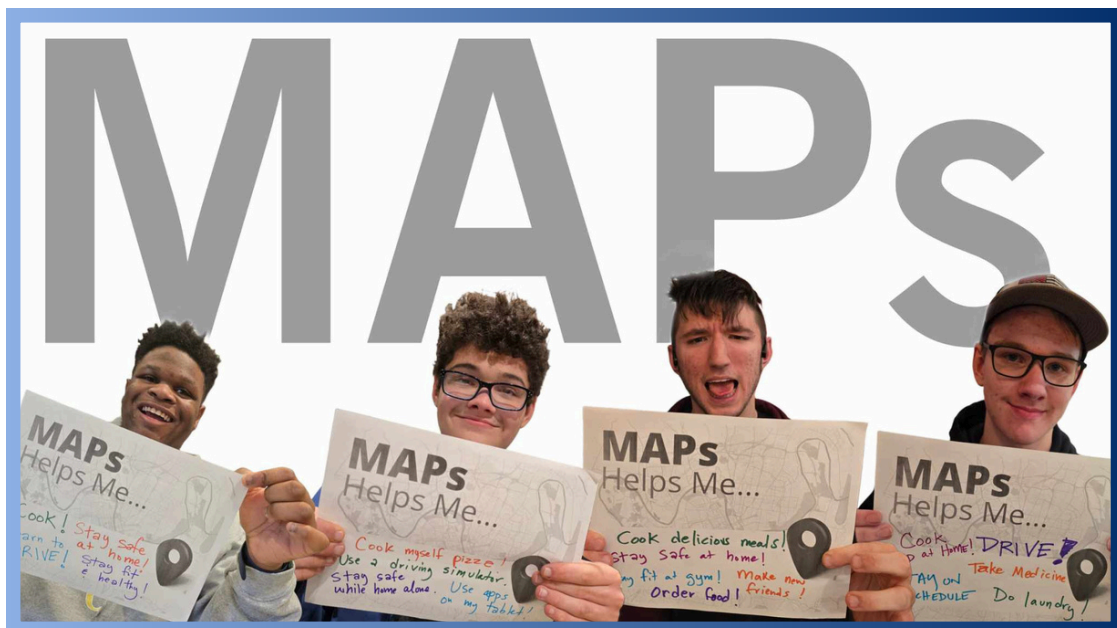
If you have a family member or loved one who meets the program criteria, **we encourage you to learn more and apply** by visiting: <https://www.tn.gov/disability-and-aging/disability-aging-programs/maps.html>

For additional information, please contact Matthew Lineberry, Vice President of Innovation, who has been leading the development and oversight of this groundbreaking program.

He can be **reached at [matthew.lineberry@brstn.org](mailto:matthew.lineberry@brstn.org)**.

*Matthew Lineberry*

Vice President of Innovation





## **Michael's Journey: Growth and Friendship Through ECF**

ECF, or Employment and Community First, is a program designed to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in achieving their goals for community inclusion. With a **focus on providing personalized services that empower participants to find meaningful work, volunteer opportunities, build social connections, and engage in their communities**, ECF helps individuals lead fulfilling lives and promotes their independence and self-sufficiency. The program emphasizes the importance of community integration and values each person's unique abilities and aspirations.

One of our program participants, Michael, has made huge strides since his start in ECF. **Michael has an intellectual developmental disability, which has made it hard for him to try new things.** He lives with his family, who are very close to him; however, they were concerned that he wouldn't like to get out into the community and might be hesitant to make friendships. While they thought **it might help him meet new people, make friends, and try fun activities, they were unsure** how Michael would respond.

Michael **began his Personal Assistant (PA) services through ECF**, and in February of 2024, he was paired with his staff, Heather Adams, who was warm and welcoming. She told him about all the fun things he could do, such as bowling, going out to eat, and shopping.

Slowly, Michael started to join in. **He went bowling with some new friends, and that is now one of his favorite activities.** While Michael receives 1:1 services, Heather makes sure to join other BRS staff for outings, encouraging and fostering friendships for Michael. **Michael has a love of cars, and recently Heather, along with Lisa Justus, another BRS staff, planned a trip to Cooter's in Nashville**, so Michael and his friends could enjoy the museum that displays replicas of the Dukes of Hazzard, including the iconic "General Lee." According to Heather, "Michael's face was priceless when we pulled up at Cooter's. He had a blast all day."

## Michael's Journey: Growth and Friendship Through ECF

As time has gone on, Michael has become more comfortable. He started to make friends not just at Buffalo River Services, but also outside of it. **He now says hello to the people he meets and is initiating conversations on his own.** Michael is known for always asking people what car they drive and reminding everyone to drive safely, wear their seatbelt, and keep an eye out for deer and cops.

Michael's family praises Heather and her efforts to help Michael grow and have new experiences. **According to Michael's family, they could never fully express how much they love and appreciate Heather and all she has done for Michael.** Michael's care coordinator has praised her efforts as well, sharing that Heather has done a fantastic job all around, and she is pleased with how happy Michael and his family are to have Heather in his life.

As Heather's supervisor, it is easy to say **Heather is patient, kind, thoughtful, and always has Michael's best interests at heart.** She plans fun events and activities and ensures that Michael is always getting the most out of his ECF services.

Buffalo River Services is blessed to have Michael and Heather as part of our growing ECF program.

*Melanie Oberg*

ECF Director





## Special Events

The Lawrence County Christmas Party was a joyful celebration filled with laughter, warmth, and holiday cheer. Friends, family, and community members gathered to share in the season's festivities, reminding us of the simple joys of togetherness. The holiday season is about the connections we make, the memories we create, and the love we share. The photos from the event capture not only smiles and decorations but the true spirit of community—showing how the people around us make the holidays bright and meaningful.



We would like to extend a **very special thank you** to the Wayne County Beagle Club for their incredible generosity in purchasing Christmas gifts for all the **Wayne County community members** served! This year, they gifted everyone a Dollar General gift card. For the past few years, the **club has**

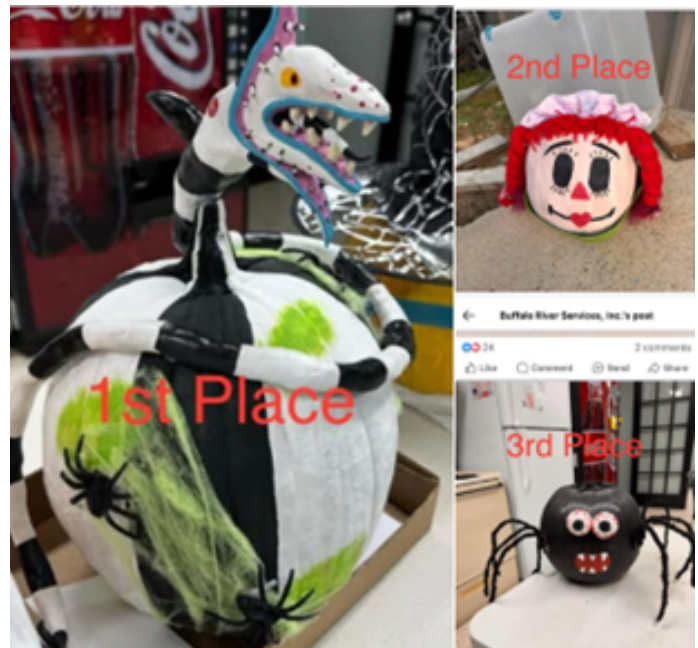
**gone above and beyond** to provide thoughtful gifts, and their kindness continues to make the holiday season brighter for so many.

*Thank  
You*



## Special Events

The Halloween festivities were a huge success this year, with some amazing highlights! The Pumpkin Decoration Contest winners showed off their creative flair, and we had a great time participating in the Trunk or Treat at Waynesboro Health & Rehab on Tuesday night. Nick, Greg, and Jackie had a blast handing out candy to the trick-or-treaters, spreading joy to all the little ghouls and goblins. It was a night filled with laughter and excitement, and the team loved seeing everyone dressed up and enjoying the fun. Staff members Lindsey Hughes, Donna Floyd, and Melanie Oberg also joined in the spirit of the season, making sure the event was a memorable one for all. It was a wonderful way to come together as a community, celebrate Halloween, and create lasting memories.





## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



**Congratulations to Melissa Brewer, MA, LBSW,** on celebrating one year with BRS! Melissa previously served as the Social Worker and Wayne County Day Services Director and returned in October 2022 as Family Support Coordinator before officially rejoining in 2023. BRS is blessed to have Melissa and the families she supports through the FS program. To mark this milestone, she received a one-year plaque and a BRS Buffalo Buck.

**Thank you, Melissa, for your dedication and hard work!**



**Congratulations to April Brewer** on 10 amazing years with BRS! As a dedicated DSP and Team Leader, April has graduated to DSP Level 4 and was honored with a graduation letter, Buffalo Bucks, and a pin.

**Thank you, April, for a decade of loyalty and dedication to BRS and those we serve. Happy Work Anniversary!**

**Congratulations to Brittany Royce** on celebrating her 1st year with BRS! She was honored with a certificate and a Buffalo Buck to mark this milestone.

**Way to go, Brittany! We're so proud to have you on the team!**



*We thank you!*



**Congratulations to Heather Adams** on earning her DSP I certification through the NADSP E-Badge Academy! Way to go, Heather, and congratulations on your bonus for completing DSP I!

**Heather is pictured below with her two children and grandson. Fun fact: her daughter, Ashlin Adams, is also a DSP at BRS!**

**Congratulations to Glenda Juarez** on 15 incredible years with BRS! As a dedicated DSP and Team Leader, Glenda has graduated to DSP Level 5 and was honored with a graduation letter, Buffalo Bucks, and a pin.

**Thank you, Glenda, for your outstanding service and dedication to BRS and those we support. Happy Work Anniversary!**





## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



**Congratulations to Debra Mashburn on her graduation to DSP Level I! Debra achieved this milestone by completing all of her training and employment requirements. She was awarded a pin, a graduation letter, and the first half of her sign-on bonus to celebrate her accomplishment. Well done, Debra! We're proud of your hard work and dedication!**



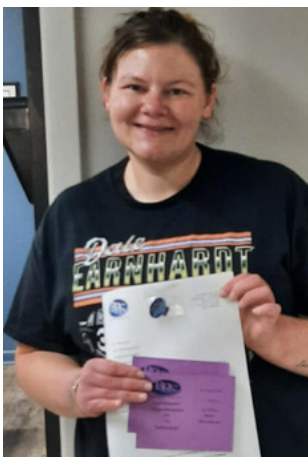
**Congratulations to Lakan Ayers on her graduation from DSP Trainee to DSP Level I! Lakan achieved this milestone by completing all her training and employment requirements. She was presented with her graduation letter and pin to mark this special accomplishment. Great job, Lakan! We're so proud of your hard work and dedication!**

**Congratulations to Rakazia Bentley on earning her DSP I certification through the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) E-Badge Academy! This is a fantastic accomplishment and a reflection of her hard work and dedication. Way to go, Rakazia, and congratulations on your bonus for completing DSP I! We're so proud of you!**



*Appreciate you!*

**Congratulations to Erika Lynn, DSP, on celebrating her 5th anniversary with BRS! Erika has graduated to DSP Level 3, a testament to her hard work and commitment. She was presented with a Level 3 graduation letter, a DSP Level 3 pin, and Buffalo Bucks to honor this achievement. Thank you, Erika, for your dedication to BRS and the individuals we support. Happy Work Anniversary, and here's to many more years of success!**



**Congratulations to Dana Jones, DSP, on receiving the second half of her sign-on bonus! Thank you, Dana, for your commitment and dedication to BRS. We're thrilled to have you on the team!**

## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

**Congratulations to Nancy Ray (pictured on the left) on completing all of her training and employment requirements! She graduated to DSP Level I, receiving a letter, pin, and the first half of her sign-on bonus. Way to go, Nancy! A big thank you to Donna Floyd (pictured on the right) for referring Nancy! Donna received the first half of her referral bonus—congratulations, Donna, and thank you for helping grow our team!**



**Congratulations to Patricia Bauman, DSP, on receiving the second half of her sign-on bonus! Great job, Patricia—we're so glad to have you on the team!**

**Congratulations to Angela Anderson on completing her training and employment requirements! She graduated to DSP Level I, receiving a letter, pin, and the first half of her sign-on bonus. Way to go, Angela!**



**Congratulations to Brandi Hammett on graduating to DSP Level 2 after completing two years of employment! Brandi received a DSP Level 2 pin, graduation memo, pay increase, and a Buffalo Buck to celebrate her anniversary. Way to go, Brandi—we're so proud of you!**



**Congratulations to Courtney Stricklin (right) on receiving the second half of her sign-on bonus! A big shoutout to Delores Mathis (left) for earning the second half of her referral bonus. Great job, ladies, and thank you both for your contributions to BRS!**

**Congratulations to Cassidy Hannah on celebrating her 1st anniversary with BRS! She was honored with a certificate and a Buffalo Buck to mark this special milestone. Happy Anniversary, Cassidy—we're so glad to have you on the team!**





# Buffalo River Services: Reflecting on 2024 Achievements and Building Toward the Future

As 2024 comes to a close, Buffalo River Services (BRS) reflects on a year of growth, resilience, and innovation. This year brought significant accomplishments, opportunities for reflection, and moments of gratitude as we advanced our mission to enhance the lives of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

While we celebrate our successes, we also pause to honor those we lost this year. Most recently, we extend our condolences to the family of Belinda Grinder, a long-term recipient of services through BRS and the Department. Belinda, along with Eve Butler, Nickie Daniels, and Teresa Folger, enriched our community and lives. Their legacies inspire us to continue our work with compassion and dedication.

## 2024 Accomplishments

### Advocates in Motion (AIMs) Training

This year, BRS hosted an impactful Advocates in Motion (AIMs) training session, empowering individuals to articulate their goals and understand their rights. A highlight of the event was self-advocate Ginger Dotson, who shared her achievements and future plans while leading discussions on individual rights. The success of this training reaffirmed our commitment to person-centered care.

### MAPS Program: Medicaid Alternative Pathways

The MAPS program continued to demonstrate its value by fostering independence through personalized care plans. Participants gained valuable skills, such as cooking, which nurtures creativity and self-sufficiency. Programs like MAPS exemplify our dedication to providing innovative, tailored support.

### CQL Accreditation and Quality Assurance Excellence

This year, we successfully completed our fourth and final review for the Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL) accreditation, further underscoring our commitment to person-centered care. We are already preparing for the next round of CQL accreditation, set to begin in late 2025.

Additionally, we received an excellent review from the Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) for our Quality Assurance process, scoring "Setting New Standards" on several indicators and reaffirming our dedication to delivering exceptional services.

### Celebrating Direct Support Professionals

During Direct Support Professionals Week, we honored our incredible team, including Melissa Justus, the first BRS staff member to complete NADSP DSP Level-I Certification. We also celebrated Heather Adams, Melissa Justus, and Rakazia Bentley, who have completed all three levels, setting a high standard in Tennessee, as well as Samantha Brewer, who achieved Level I.





# **Buffalo River Services: Reflecting on 2024 Achievements and Building Toward the Future**

## **SHIFT Accreditation and Technological Advancements**

We were honored to receive two-year accreditation from Tech First SHIFT, emphasizing our commitment to integrating technology into our services. These advancements enhance the daily lives of both individuals and staff, ensuring greater efficiency and quality.

## **Supported Employment Pilot Program**

Buffalo River Services is proud to have been accepted into the DDA/SHIFT Supported Employment Accreditation pilot program. This milestone reflects our commitment to advancing Employment First principles and providing competitive, integrated opportunities for individuals we serve.

Through this program, we will collaborate with **SHIFT** and **DDA** to implement best practices, refine organizational systems, and achieve accreditation. This initiative strengthens our role as a leader in supported employment, empowering individuals with opportunities that foster independence and dignity.

We look forward to engaging with stakeholders, leveraging innovative strategies, and sharing success stories as we embark on this transformative journey. Together, we are shaping a brighter future—one that prioritizes independence, meaningful work, and quality of life for all.

## **Buffalo River Services: A Vision for the Future**

As we look to the future, BRS remains dedicated to sustainable growth, innovation, and delivering the highest standards of care. Our goals include:

- Expanding residential and employment services.
- Strengthening community partnerships.
- Embracing technology to streamline operations and improve services.
- Enhancing leadership development and fostering financial stability.

By focusing on these areas, we are building a resilient foundation for continued growth. Our commitment to client satisfaction and maintaining the highest quality of service ensures we remain a trusted partner in the community.

As we step into 2025, Buffalo River Services is dedicated to empowering individuals, supporting our team, and deepening our impact. Together, we are shaping a future of opportunity and excellence.

*Phil Garner, CEO*

## **OUR MISSION:**

Building Relationships  
Reaching Goals  
Supporting individuals