

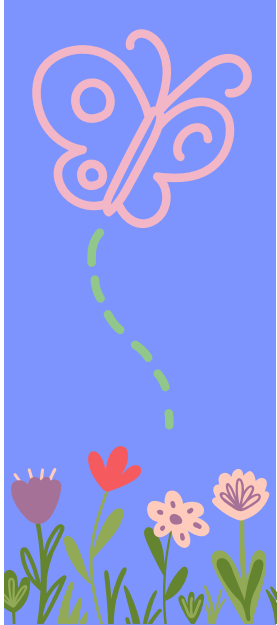
OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

BUFFALO RIVER

SERVICES, INC.



CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED BY: BREANNA JOHNSON.



MARCH 2025

Jackie Taylor had a **fantastic time** at the Valentine's Dance, where she had the opportunity to **connect with friends, meet new people, and enjoy a night of fun and laughter.** *If you know Jackie, you know how much she loves to dance—and she brought that joy to the dance floor, making the evening even more special!*

Events like these are so important for creating meaningful social experiences, **building confidence,** and **opening the door to new friendships and opportunities.** Jackie's energy and excitement lit up the room, and it was truly a night to remember!



Serving our communities for over 50 years!



Staff Memo from our CEO

To All Program & Administrative Staff

Key Updates – Legislative Advocacy, Accreditation, Staffing & More

LEGISLATIVE & ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

DSP Wage Advocacy – Urgent Action Needed

We are actively working with **TNCO and legislative partners** to support **Senate Budget Amendment #63**, which proposes funding to **increase wages for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs)**.

Why This Matters: Improving DSP compensation remains a top priority, and agency leadership is committed to **staying engaged** as the budget process moves forward.

Medicaid & Budget Concerns

Advocacy organizations including Disability Rights TN and The Arc TN have raised concerns about budget proposals that could **restrict access to vital Medicaid services and disability supports**.

Next Steps: We are closely monitoring these developments and will share important updates, including any **advocacy actions needed**.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: THE POWER OF UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Emotional intelligence isn't just a buzzword—it's a **key skill** that helps us navigate **work, relationships, and leadership** with clarity and compassion.

Psychologist **Howard Gardner** identified two core types of intelligence that shape emotional awareness:

- **Intrapersonal Intelligence** – Understanding **yourself**
- **Interpersonal Intelligence** – Understanding **others**

Why This Matters:

- When you **recognize your own emotions**, you can **manage them more effectively**.
- When you **tune in to others' emotions**, you build **trust, resolve conflicts, and communicate more clearly**.

Try This Today:

At the end of your workday, take 3 minutes to reflect:

- What emotions did I experience today?
- How did they affect my decisions or interactions?
- What might others around me have been feeling?

ACCREDITATION & EMPLOYMENT FIRST SHIFT “Employment First” Accreditation

Buffalo River Services is pursuing Employment First Accreditation with SHIFT, reinforcing our commitment to competitive, integrated employment as the first and preferred outcome for those we support.

What This Means for You:

- Updates to documentation and reporting
- Targeted staff training
- Implementation of new platforms

Your participation is essential as we move through this process.

CQL Accreditation – Fourth Cycle Launching Soon

We are preparing to begin our fourth accreditation cycle with CQL – The Council on Quality and Leadership.

Why This Matters:

- Strengthens our person-centered practices
- Reinforces rights protection
- Drives continuous quality improvement

Stay tuned! More details and next steps will be shared soon with relevant team members.

Statewide Accreditation Planning

Buffalo River Services is participating in ongoing discussions with TNCO and the Department of Disability and Aging (DDA) to shape long-term accreditation strategies for Tennessee providers.

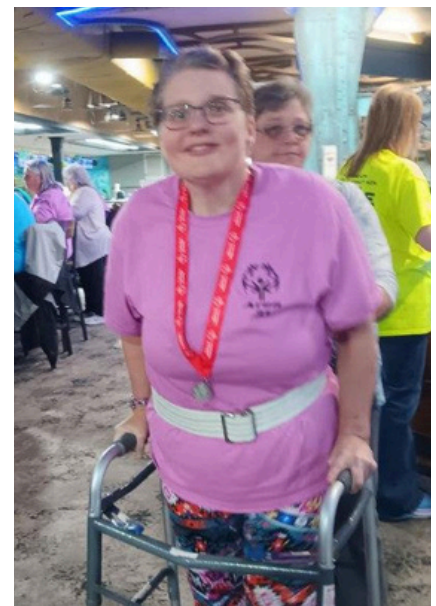
We Value Your Input: If you have ideas, concerns, or feedback, we encourage you to share them as we help develop a statewide approach that prioritizes people first.

Remember: Little things matter – whether it's taking time to **reflect, learning something new, or speaking up** for the people we support. **Small steps** make a **big difference!** Thank you for your continued commitment and dedication to those we serve.

Phil Garner
CEO, Buffalo River Services

Bowling Fun at the Special Olympics!

Athletes had an **amazing time at the Special Olympics Bowling event** at Tenn Pinn Alley in Columbia! The lanes were filled with excitement, cheers, and plenty of strikes as participants gave it their all. It was a fantastic day of fun, sportsmanship, and celebration.



Jackie Taylor & DSP Nancy Davis Enjoy Wildcat Basketball Fun!

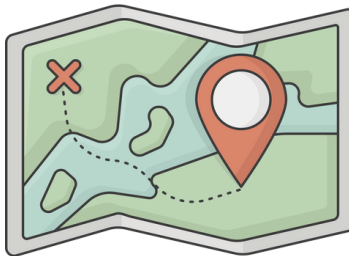
Jackie Taylor and her Direct Support Professional (DSP), Nancy Davis, have been having a fantastic time attending the girls' Wildcat Basketball games, including their exciting Alumni Game! Coach Molly and the team always give Jackie a **warm welcome**, and at one special game, they even presented her with a Wildcat shirt to wear in support.

Jackie didn't just cheer from the sidelines—she **took center stage at halftime**, dancing alongside the cheerleaders! If you know Jackie, you know how much she loves to dance, and this was **a moment full of joy and energy**.

Nancy and Jackie share many fun adventures together, and these basketball games are just one example of the wonderful experiences they enjoy.

A **special thank you to Melanie Oberg** for sharing this story!





Meeting Milestones: MAPS Program Update

Our **Medicaid Alternative Pathways to Independence (MAPS)** program continues to grow and thrive, welcoming new faces, celebrating big wins, and strengthening community connections!

We are excited to announce the addition of our **eighth MAPS participant** – a sign of the **program's growing impact**. Each participant brings unique goals, talents, and dreams. Through **personalized support, tools, and resources**, we're helping them turn those dreams into reality.

Recently, several MAPS members have hit **major personal milestones**—from gaining employment to developing new life skills. These achievements are a reflection of the participants' **hard work and the power of MAPS**. We couldn't be prouder!

MAPS is more than just skill-building – it's about **creating community**. Group activities, social outings, and shared experiences help participants **form lasting friendships and a strong support network**.

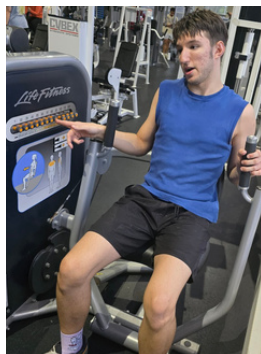
Health and wellness are also a big focus. Many participants are **staying active** by joining local gyms and learning how to **create their own workout routines**. In the kitchen, our cooking sessions have been a hit! Participants have been **exploring healthy recipes, improving their nutrition knowledge**, and even **preparing meals for their families**.

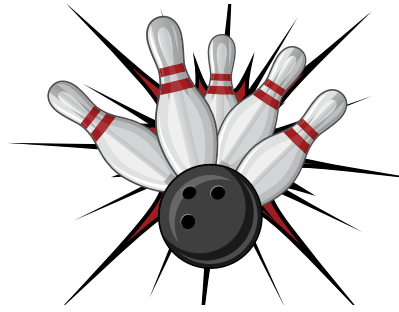
MAPS also helps members connect with valuable community resources, expanding their **independence and involvement** in the local community. Whether it's through employment, social events, or local partnerships, we are **building bridges every day**.

We are also thrilled to **welcome Chandler Brown as the newest MAPS staff member!** In just a short time, Chandler has already made meaningful connections with participants and families. His **enthusiasm and dedication** are truly making a difference.

As we continue forward, we celebrate every step and every success. **Here's to even more milestones ahead!**

Courtesy of Matthew Lineberry
VP of Innovation





Guy's Bowling Night Out!

In late February, we hosted a **Guy's Night Out at Kingpin Lanes** in Lawrenceburg, TN – and it was a blast! This fun evening was also a crossover activity, bringing together participants from two of our programs.

Karsen and Sam from the **MAPS Program** teamed up with Matt from our **Supported Living Program** for a night filled with bowling, pizza, and plenty of laughs. They were joined by MAPS staff member Chandler Brown and our VP of Innovation, Matthew Lineberry.

Beyond just having fun, this outing helped reinforce one of our **key goals: building community connections**. The MAPS program focuses on supporting individuals in finding friends who share **common interests, helping create meaningful and lasting friendships**.

Big thanks to everyone who made this night a success – way to go, team!

Courtesy of Matthew Lineberry
VP of Innovation





Staff Shout Out: Lisa Justus & Randall's Journey with Enabling Technology!

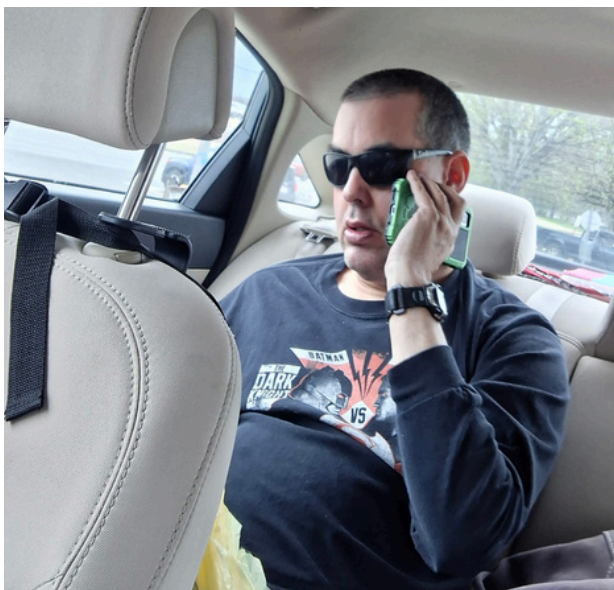
A huge **shout-out to Lisa Justus** in the ECF program for her dedication and creativity in supporting Randall's independence! A few months ago, Randall shared with Lisa that he wanted a phone. So, for his birthday, **Lisa surprised him with a phone** and a one-month pre-paid plan. She patiently showed him how to use it, programmed key contacts with photos, and set him up for success.

Not long after, Randall's parents started receiving unexpected calls—right from the next room! They were **amazed at how quickly he learned to use his phone** and were so impressed that they decided to continue his plan each month.

Lisa noticed how much joy Randall found in making calls and how it significantly improved his communication skills. On the phone, he was **able to hold much longer conversations than in person**, and he loved reaching out to his "buddies." Recently, Randall independently called ECF Director Melanie Oberg, where they chatted for 15 minutes—a huge milestone!

This story is a wonderful example of how **enabling technology can empower individuals**, increase independence, and enhance communication. Lisa's commitment to helping those she serves grow and learn has made a meaningful impact on Randall and his family.

Great job, Lisa, for your dedication and creativity, and congratulations to Randall on mastering his new skill! A special **thank you to Melanie Oberg for sharing** this inspiring story!





BUFFALO RIVER SERVICES FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM:

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**





Buffalo River Services Welcomes Tommy Lee Kidd to the Board of Directors!

We are excited to announce that Tommy Lee Kidd has joined the Buffalo River Services Board of Directors! His **leadership, experience, and dedication** to serving the community make him a perfect addition to our team. His passion for **empowering individuals with disabilities** aligns with our mission, and we look forward to the positive impact he will bring. Please join us in welcoming Tommy Lee Kidd to the Buffalo River Services family!

*“My name is **Tommy Lee Kidd**, my wife is **Lesia Robbins Kidd**, and our daughter is **Donna ‘Abigail’ Kidd**. Abigail was born in the year of **2000 and has Down Syndrome**. Because of Abigail’s disability, Lesia and I have a burning passion to help people with disabilities and their families. We believe that **every person, regardless of their physical or mental challenge, should have an opportunity to participate in organized events**. From this passion, Lesia and I created a nonprofit Organization called **Abigail’s Plan**. The name, Abigail’s Plan, came to life as soon as Abigail started communicating with us verbally. In everything we do, Abigail must know ‘the plan’. **Abigail’s Plan is recognized by the federal government as a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization.**”*

We are also **grateful for Senator Walley**, who continues to be a strong advocate and a true friend to our services. His ongoing support makes a real difference in the lives of those we serve. Pictured **here with the Kidd family, Senator Walley’s presence is a testament** to the power of community and collaboration.

#BuffaloRiverServices #CommunityLeadership #WelcomeTommyLeeKidd





2025 MegaConference Registration Now Open

The Arc Tennessee has announced that guest registration is open for the 2025 MegaConference, happening May 22-23 at Loews

We're excited to share that **registration is now open** for the **2025 MegaConference**, hosted by The Arc Tennessee. This year's conference will take place **May 22-23** at the beautiful **Loews Nashville Hotel at Vanderbilt Plaza**.

With the theme **"Past Reflections, Future Directions,"** the 2025 MegaConference promises two days of inspiring keynote speakers, informative breakout sessions, and meaningful connections for individuals with disabilities, families, caregivers, and professionals across the state.

What to Expect:

- **Thursday Highlights:** Keynote presentations from Dr. Bruce Keisling and the LifeCourse team, sharing insights into tools and strategies for planning a good life across all stages.
- **Friday Spotlight:** A presentation from the Tennessee Department of Disability and Aging, followed by a special performance by Friends Life Community that you won't want to miss!
- **Breakout Sessions:** Covering topics across the LifeCourse Domains such as employment, community living, health, advocacy, and more — these sessions are designed to offer practical tools and real-life examples.

This is a fantastic opportunity to learn, grow, and connect with others who are passionate about creating better futures for people with disabilities. Whether you're a self-advocate, family member, staff member, or provider — there's something for everyone.

We encourage all members of the Buffalo River Services community to attend!

For more information or to register, visit [The Arc Tennessee's website](#) or contact us for help signing up.

Abigail's Plan Miracle League — Registration Now Open!



Who Can Join? Individuals with special needs, ages 5 and up

Game Location: Bobby Brewer Park, Lawrenceburg, TN

Cost: **FREE!**

How to Register:

Pick up a registration form at:

- **Pulaski:** First Baptist Church (Mon-Thurs, 8 AM – 5 PM)
- **Lawrenceburg:** Fox Sporting Goods
- **Waynesboro:** Roger Smith Insurance



For more details, contact Tommy Lee Kidd at ☎ 931-629-8859 or

visit 🌐 www.abigailsplan.org

Come be part of a fun, inclusive baseball experience designed for athletes of all abilities!

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Piper Loyd (right) received the 2nd half of her sign on Bonus! Loria Youtsey (left) received the 2nd half of her referral Bonus! Congratulations ladies!!



Elizabeth Morgan received the 1st half of her sign on bonus after completing her Training and Employment Requirements. She graduated to a DSP Level I. She received her DSP LI pin and a letter. This accomplishment also comes with a pay increase. Congratulations Elizabeth!



We thank you!



Regina Pexton received her letter of Graduation to DSP Level I after completing all of her training and employment requirements. She also received the 1st half of her sign on bonus. Congratulations Regina!

Congratulations to Chandler Brown on completing his initial orientation and graduating to a DSP Level I! Chandler was presented his lapel pin and the first half of his sign-on bonus yesterday by Matt Lineberry, Vice President of Innovation. Chandler is also going to start next week in a new role serving as our FIRST Maps program support team member! Maps is one of our newest programs that serves our young-adult population as they transition from high school into adulthood. It focuses on several areas of independence, such as travel, work, home safety, and more! We look forward to seeing Chandler's success in the program!



If you'd like to learn more about MAPS, visit here: <https://www.tn.gov/.../disability-aging-programs/maps.html>

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



Nancy Ray (left) recently received the 2nd half of her sign on bonus, and Donna Floyd (right) received the 2nd half of her referral bonus!!

Tehya Hobbs (right) has graduated to a DSP Level I by completing all her training and employment requirements. She received a letter with a DSP LI pin and the 1st half of her sign on bonus! Toby Lineberry (left) received the 1st half of his referral Bonus!



Robbie Rich graduated to DSP Level I by completing all his training and employment requirements. He received a letter with a DSP LI pin and the 1st half of his sign on bonus!

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





A Message from Our CEO

Dear Friends and Supporters,

At Buffalo River Services, we remain steadfast in our **commitment to advocating for policies and initiatives** that support the rights, dignity, and well-being of individuals with disabilities. As we navigate evolving challenges and opportunities, I want to share some **critical updates** that impact the communities we serve.

Federal Proposal to Shift Special Education Oversight

President Donald J. Trump has **proposed transferring special education** oversight from the U.S. Department of Education to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). While details remain limited and such a move would **require Congressional approval**, this proposal has raised concerns among educators and disability advocates.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that students with disabilities **receive a free, appropriate public education** in the least restrictive environment. Moving oversight to HHS could shift disability education into a medical framework rather than an educational one, potentially **affecting inclusivity and service** quality in schools.

Medicaid Funding and Service Sustainability

There is growing concern about **potential Medicaid funding reductions**. Proposals to implement block grants or per-capita caps could lead to federal funding cuts, shifting the financial burden onto states. This could result in service reductions for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Maintaining strong Medicaid **funding is critical to ensuring the continuity and quality of essential services** for individuals and families who rely on them.

Civil Rights and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Several legislative initiatives have sought to modify key provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including waiting periods before individuals can file accessibility complaints. These changes **could hinder timely accommodations** and weaken the rights of individuals with disabilities. **Vigilance and advocacy are essential** to preserve the integrity of civil rights protections.

Tennessee's Initiative to Support Direct Support Professionals (DSPs)

On a positive note, Tennessee is considering a **budget amendment** to allocate \$9.9 million in recurring state funds to increase wages for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) working under the 1915(c) and 1115 waiver programs. If matched with federal funds, this **initiative would raise the average DSP wage, improving workforce stability and enhancing the quality of support** for individuals with disabilities.

State Housing Survey: Your Voice Matters

Accessible, affordable, and inclusive **housing remains a major challenge** for Tennesseans with disabilities. A statewide housing survey is currently underway to gather feedback from individuals with disabilities, caregivers, and family members. **Your participation will help shape future policies** to improve housing options.

Survey Details:

- Estimated Time: 10–20 minutes
- Survey Link: <https://bit.ly/TNsurvey4dishousing>
- Hashtags: #TennesseeHousing #HousingForAll #DisabilityForwardHousing

Please take a moment to complete the survey and share it with others in your network.

Moving Forward Together

As always, Buffalo River Services **remains dedicated to advocating, supporting, and strengthening the communities** we serve. Your voice, engagement, and support are **invaluable** as we continue this work together. **Thank you** for being part of our mission.

In Service,

Phil Garner, CEO

OUR MISSION:
Building Relationships
Reaching Goals
Supporting individuals