



Brandon Brown has served as the Executive Director of Empower TN since August 2015. Previously, he served for ten years at Nashville CARES where he directed various client services for people living with HIV/AIDS, including behavioral health and wellness education programs. He has also served on the Board of Directors for Nashville in Harmony, including one term as President. His first professional experience was as a public-school teacher, serving in both Georgia and Alabama. Brandon holds a bachelor's degree from the University of North Alabama and a master's degree from Vanderbilt University; and is credentialed as a Licensed Professional Counselor in the State of Tennessee, earned recognition as a National Certified Counselor, and is an Approved Clinical Supervisor. He has presented at the local, regional, and national level on topics of behavioral health, clinical supervision, ethics, and organizational wellness. Through his professional work as an educator, counselor, and non-profit leader, as well as through his own personal and family life, Brandon has witnessed and experienced the struggles and triumphs of people living with disabilities; and he is honored to lead Empower Tennessee in its work with, and for, this community.



Ebony Cole became an Independent Living Specialist for Empower Tennessee in October 2018. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Western Kentucky University and master's degrees from Tennessee State University and Trevecca Nazarene University. As a native Nashvillian, Ebony has always been committed to the betterment of her community. She has worked with Metro Nashville Public schools as a ParaProfessional where she provided students, who had various disabilities, with resources and tools for independence and success. She served as a Middle School teacher



and hosted several female youth groups teaching them hygiene, etiquette, and alternatives to violence. Ebony has volunteered time the Adult Literacy Council and Hands on Nashville. She believes it is her passion and calling to help those who seek support. She is dedicated to ensuring that everyone, regardless of their circumstance, can receive the reinforcements they need to live a happy independent life.

Gina Lynette is Associate Director at Empower Tennessee. In that role, Gina evaluates current programs and devises strategies for greater effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. Gina also researches potential new initiatives that align with Empower Tennessee’s mission and philosophy. In addition, Gina leads the agency’s communication efforts, and assists the executive director in revenue development planning. Previously, Gina was Director of Communications, Learning, and Development for Support; Training for Exceptional Parents (STEP), facilitating the agency’s event planning, social media, and online learning, and conducting person-centered training for project staff, families, and groups of young people with disabilities. Empower Tennessee is proud to tap into Gina’s passion for guiding and assisting individuals and families in defining, planning, and acquiring the individualized resources and supports needed, while promoting self-determination and independent living skills. This passion comes from her personal experience living with disabilities, as well as from co-parenting her four children; three of whom experience developmental disabilities; with her husband, Ned Andrew Solomon. Gina holds a BS in Organizational Management from Tusculum College, and an MS in Psychology with a specialization in Leadership Coaching from Capella University. She has successfully guided organizations through the strategic planning process, including goal-setting, implementation, and evaluation; coached individuals through life transitions using a variety of tools to address financial, emotional, and practical needs; and presented as a featured speaker at local, statewide, and national group meetings on a variety of subjects including strategic planning, disability sensitivity, People First Language, stress management, self-advocacy, supported decision-making, and life transition planning.



April Meredith has been the Independent Living and Advocacy Specialist for Empower TN since July 2016. Previously, she served over two years as an executive board and advisory committee member with People First of TN through the Our Community Standing Strong grant. Early in her career, April lived and worked in Japan for nearly a decade, including three years as an Assistant Language Teacher in the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program and two years as a Prefectural (State) Advisor, where she taught English and culture, promoted internationalization at the grassroots level, and solidified her passion for advocacy and peer



mentoring. April holds a bachelor's degree from East Tennessee State University, is 2014 alumni of the TN Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna and is a 2015 Partners in Policy Making graduate. She strongly values diversity, is an accomplished writer/poet, and considers it a great honor to be part of this amazing nonprofit organization. April aims to break down barriers and build bridges with and for people with disabilities so that we may all live as independently as we choose.

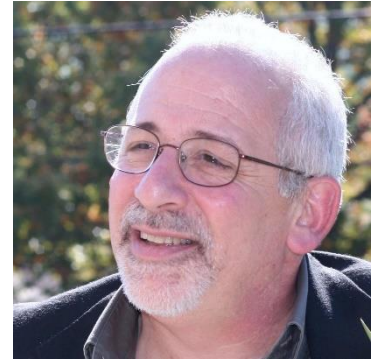
Marissa Smith Fletcher has been an Independent Living and Referral Specialist with Empower Tennessee since August 2017. She holds a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from Watkins College of Art & Design. Marissa is a Nashville native who has committed herself to providing direct services to those in need throughout Middle Tennessee. This includes several years of working with the elderly, immigrant and refugees, people with disabilities, and disenfranchised populations. She is on the Board of Metro Parks Disabilities and Magic Program and volunteers her time for non-profits that assist in local and global development. She continues to play an active role in helping others navigate through the difficulties of the world in which they live, while engaging in the creative transformation of the world that we all share.



Evan Espey joined Empower Tennessee as our Technology and Access Coordinator in 2020. In this role, Evan oversees the Assistive Technology (AT) program and resources to best help consumers reach their maximum independence through the use of AT. A recognized authority, advocate, and resource for Tennessee's community of people with disabilities, Evan Espey brings over a decade of Public Policy, Outreach, Fundraising, Community Relations, and Assistive Technology experience to Empower Tennessee. Born with Spina Bifida, Evan understands the particular needs and daily experiences of people living with disabilities—because he lives it. After successfully navigating the complex requirements of attending college with his condition when formerly earning a B.S. degree in Human Services from Murray State University, he continued to expand his knowledge and talent value, completing a M.S. degree in Strategic Communication and Leadership from Belmont University in 2020.



Ned Andrew Solomon is a speaker, trainer, writer, editor, musician, and artist. He is the father and stepfather of four, now-adult children, three of which have developmental disabilities. He has delivered trainings across the state of Tennessee on youth transition to adulthood, the importance of self-advocacy, disability awareness and sensitivity, providing supports that truly support, and conducting and participating in effective meetings. Retired from state government work, Ned Andrew provides communications support for non-profits.



Joey Ellis is the Family & Youth Educator and Mentor/ Post-Secondary Transition Specialist and became part of the STEP team in July of 2011. Joey holds a B.S. Special Education from the University of Tennessee at Martin and has 5 years of teaching experience in both CDC and Resource settings. As a person who experiences disability, a mild form of Cerebral Palsy, Mr. Ellis had an IEP growing up. He watched as his parents advocated for his rights and eventually began advocating for his own rights. These life circumstances led him to pursue a degree in Special Education and a career helping both students with special needs and their families. Joey's areas of expertise and special interest are in transition planning, Autism, and Cerebral Palsy.



Ben Roberts, a Licensed Professional Counselor, a National Certified Counselor and owner of Purposed Life, LLC in Gallatin, TN. This counseling practice has a special commitment to helping minority populations, young adults, and communities of faith in the Middle Tennessee area. Ben provides training, workshops, and groups for churches and businesses throughout Tennessee. Ben is also a Military and Family Life Counselor (MFLC), where he provides military families non-medical solution-focused counseling to assist with transitions, deployments, relocations, and reunifications. Ben is the co-founder of "The Soul of Black Men" (SOBM) a group dedicated to destigmatizing mental health for black men.



Sarah Love McCoy is an artist, writer and teacher working on expanding and awakening the power of love in herself and human hearts the world over. Creator of the “I Stand for Love” Calendar (in its 17th year in print!), Sarah's best known for her daily nuggets of inspiration. She's dedicated to delivering a message of love every day to help us remember the truly innate magic we hold while cultivating hope for the future.



As the illustrator of the Mystics Oracle Deck, Sarah uses art to access intuition, guidance and wisdom beyond rational thinking.

Helping people connect with their inner knowing and allow their own brilliance to surface and shine is when Sarah feels most on purpose. The belief that healing our inner wounds, learning to trust our hearts, moving energy through our hands (while getting out of our heads) and coming together in community as a path towards a more loving tomorrow is the philosophy behind Sarah's mission and purpose.

You can find out more at www.istandforlove.com.

Jeff Harry shows individuals and companies how to tap into their true selves, to feel their happiest and most fulfilled — all by playing. He has worked with Google, Microsoft, Southwest Airlines, Adobe, the NFL, Amazon, and Facebook, helping their staff to infuse more play into the day-to-day.



Jeff is an international speaker who has presented at conferences such as INBOUND, SXSW, and Australia's Pausefest, showing audiences how major issues in the workplace can be solved using play. He was selected by Engagedly as one of the Top 100 HR Influencers of 2020 for his organizational development work around addressing toxicity in the workplace.

His playwork has been featured in the New York Times, AJ+, SoulPancake, the SF Chronicle, and CNN.

While we spend most of our time pretending to be important, serious grownups, it's when we let go of that facade and just play, that the real magic happens. Fully embracing your own nerdy genius — whatever that is — gives you the power to make a difference and change lives.

Jeff believes that we already have many of the answers we seek, and by simply unleashing our inner child, we can find our purpose and, in turn, help to create a better world.

Audrey McDonough NextJob's Director of Community Partnerships, including NextJob's charitable work. This program supports non-profit and faith-based organizations in their mission to help re-employ their clients, by giving them access to NextJob's online job search system and job club workshop materials.

In addition to her work with the Community Partnership program, Audrey is a Senior Certified Job Coach. She joined the NextJob team in 2015 as an extension of her over 30-year career in nonprofit leadership, education, team building and training.

Audrey has a B.A. in Education and an M.A. in Management. She is also a Myers-Briggs and Strong Interest Inventory Certified Practitioner.

Her lifelong passion has been helping others to be successful and identify their authentic and best self.



Joely Cifre joined the American Red Cross Mid-South Chapter in October of 2018. She is the Disaster Program Specialist for Mass Care, Logistics, and Preparedness. On her first day she opened a shelter and participated in an airport drill. Within two weeks she was deployed to support recovery efforts for Hurricane Michael. Since then, she has been a part of several local deployments, mostly in the Memphis area. In what she considers her "previous life," Joely worked for 15 years as a television newscast producer. She eventually moved into the non-profit world, first as the Volunteer Manager for the largest no-kill animal shelter in Texas and then for a non-profit nature center. As an Air Force wife, Joely also volunteers to support families with trainees going into Basic Military Training.

