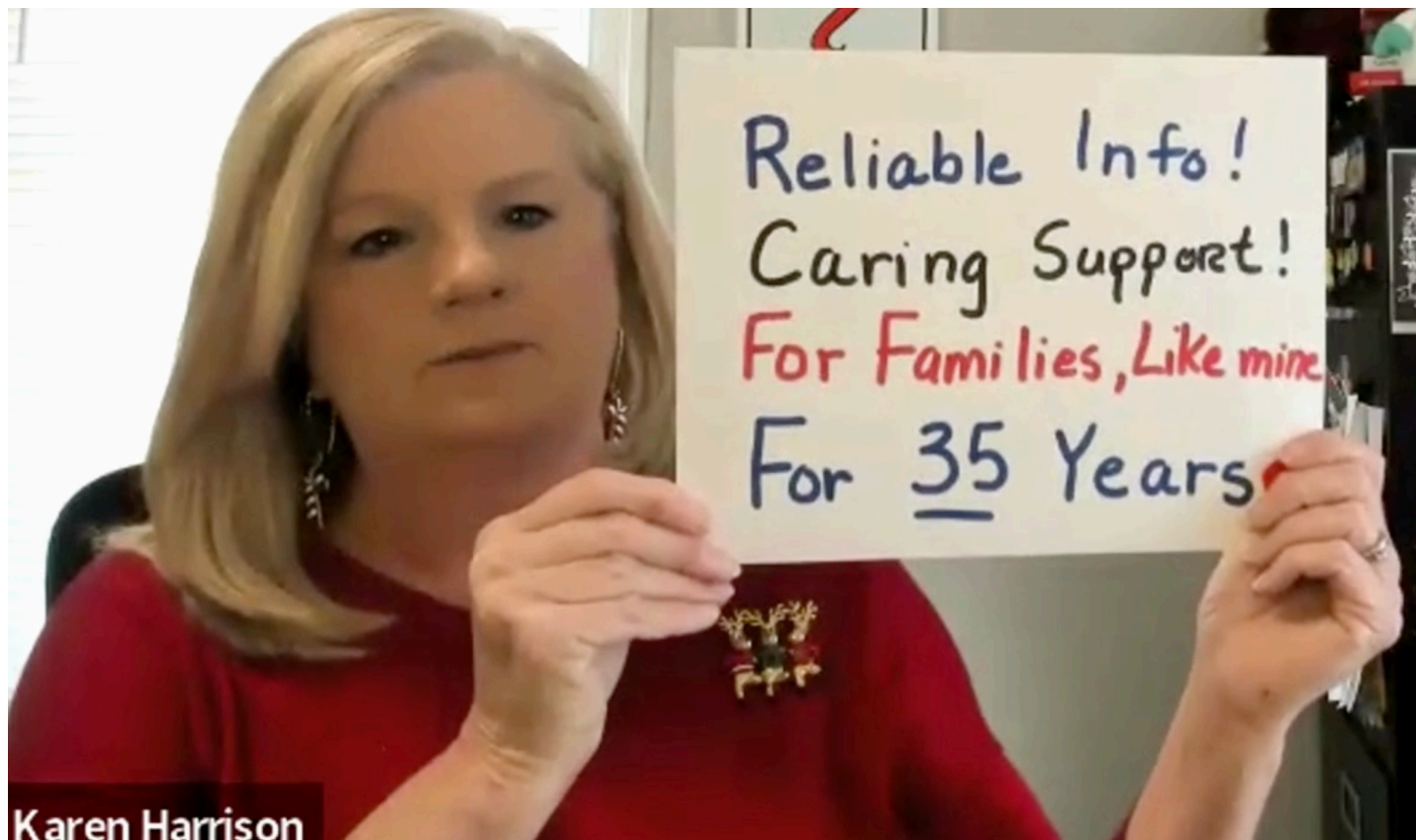


NEWSLETTER

WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER



In This Issue:

- ★ Team Brags
- ★ Upcoming Training
- ★ Advocacy In Action
- ★ Contact Us

Parent Training and Information Services

TNSTEP's vision is to ensure a brighter future for children and youth in Tennessee.

"We are experts at informing and empowering parents of children and youth with disabilities who receive education services."

-Karen Harrison, TNSTEP Executive Director



TURNING EXPERIENCE INTO ADVOCACY FOR FAMILIES

Rachel is a devoted mother and Family Life Educator who brings **a deep passion for special education and community service to her role on the TNSTEP Board.** With firsthand experience navigating the special education system, Rachel is committed to ensuring that no parent feels alone in the process. Her mission is to empower families by sharing the insights she has gained and helping them overcome similar challenges.

Rachel believes every child matters and deserves the opportunity to succeed. TNSTEP's mission resonates deeply with her values, and she is driven to help families advocate effectively and confidently. *"Your perspective on your child is uniquely valuable,"* she says. *"IEPs are designed to empower, so speak up for what works—and stay open to new strategies that can support your child's growth."*

Rachel holds an Associate Degree in Health Administration from Madisonville Community College and is currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Education at Austin Peay State University. Her dedication to strengthening families and helping children thrive shines through in everything she does.

*"YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON YOUR CHILD IS
UNIQUELY VALUABLE,"*



Rachel Reeves
Board of Directors



UPCOMING OPPORTUNITY



EMPOWER VI Opportunities

The goal of EMPOWER VI is to equip transition-age youth, their families, and the professionals who serve them with virtual supports to improve postschool outcomes. These virtual programs create opportunities for connection and support, especially for those in rural areas who may not have access to in-person resources. Below are brief descriptions of our current programs with links to learn more.

Opportunities for Students

Virtual Mentorship

EMPOWER VI is recruiting juniors and seniors who are blind or have low vision (from any U.S. state) for their 2025-2026 virtual EMPOWER VI Mentoring Program. Scan this QR code for more information about the role and to access the application.



Student Advisory Board

They are also seeking three high school students who are blind or have low vision to join their Student Advisory Board for the 2025-2026 school year. To learn more and fill out an interest form scan the QR code to apply.



Opportunities for Professionals and Families

Community of Practice



Starting in the fall of 2025, EMPOWER VI will begin hosting Communities of Practice (CoPs) for adult family members and professionals. CoPs provide an opportunity for family members/professionals to learn and build community. If you are interested in joining CoPs, please scan the QR code to access the interest form.

Mentorship



They are recruiting blind and low vision adults (from any U.S. state) for their 2025-2026 virtual EMPOWER VI Mentoring Program. For more information about the program and to complete an application scan this QR code.



IEP vs. 504: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE AND WHY IT MATTERS WORKSHOP

Are you unsure whether an IEP or a 504 Plan is right for your child?

Join TNSTEP as we break down the key differences between these two education supports. Learn how each one can impact your child's learning experience, what services they offer, and how to determine which option best fits your family's needs. Empower yourself with knowledge and take the next step in advocating for your child's success!

Virtual Workshop



Date

Wednesday, May 28, 2025

Time

6:00 - 7:30 pm CT

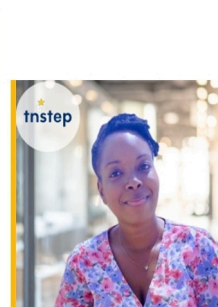
Registration Online:

<https://bit.ly/4jCUujv>

Meeting Platform: Zoom

Meeting ID: 851 7622 4466

Passcode: 578875




trainer

Katherine Williams

Director of West TN Services

katherine.williams@tnstep.info

(901) 763-6022

For additional information contact:

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Sponsored by:

UTHSC
CENTER FOR YOUTH ADVOCACY
AND WELL-BEING



YOUTH ADVOCACY SERIES EMPOWERS THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

Over the past several weeks, TNSTEP, Ed Trust TN and PEATC teamed up to host a **two-part virtual training series designed to help youth with disabilities build strong self-advocacy and community engagement skills**. The sessions, Stinks to Be Sue: Detective Work & Youth Advocacy Skills and YOUTH Ignited: Why Community Advocacy is More Important Than Ever, brought together passionate young people, families, and allies from across Tennessee. Participants explored how to speak up in IEP meetings, recognize when their voices are being left out of important decisions, and use social media and storytelling to advocate for change in their communities. These powerful lessons were paired with real-life strategies to help youth feel more confident and prepared to lead.

We were honored to welcome **Representative Sam McKenzie** as our special guest during the final session. His thoughtful words reminded attendees that their voices matter—and that youth have a role to play in shaping policy and the future of our state.

A heartfelt thank you to every young person who attended, the caregivers and supporters who joined them, and our generous sponsors who helped make this experience possible. Your energy, curiosity, and passion are what make events like this so meaningful. **Stay tuned—this is only the beginning.**

edtrust
TENNESSEE

peatc | WAZE TO ADULTHOOD



NO PARENT OF A CHILD WITH A DISABILITY SHOULD HAVE TO WALK THIS JOURNEY ALONE.

We believe parents know their children best and CAN BE their child's best advocate. Families who receive TNSTEP services report these results:

- Increased skills to address their children's mental health and behavioral needs;
- Consistent and improved school attendance;
- Increase in functional skills that impact independent living;
- Improved academic achievement that leads to graduation and employment.



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Contact Us

To receive a printed copy of this newsletter, please send a request to tnstepcomms@gmail.com.

Donate



YOUR TAX-DEDUCTIBLE GIFT TELLS A PARENT,
"YOU DON'T HAVE TO WALK THIS JOURNEY ALONE."