

NEWSLETTER

WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER



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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



A PASSION FOR POLICY & PEOPLE: INTERN SPOTLIGHT ON ELENA

We're excited to spotlight **Elena, our Government and Community Affairs Intern** from Vanderbilt's Peabody College. From day one, she jumped into TNSTEP's mission, advocating for families and supporting meaningful change in the special education community.

"What first drew me to TNSTEP," Elena shared, "was the organization's dedication to walking alongside families for the long haul. TNSTEP doesn't just talk about advocacy—it lives it every day." She was surprised to learn that our small but mighty team supports families across all 95 counties, serving children and youth with any disability from birth through age 26.

A standout moment of her internship was meeting with lawmakers, where Elena saw firsthand the strategy and persistence behind policy work. She also attended a disability conference, hearing stories that reminded her that advocacy is about real people, empowerment, opportunity, and belonging.



Elena Lotano
Intern

Elena says her experience at TNSTEP has shaped her future. She now hopes to build a career at the intersection of policy and direct service, helping make systems more equitable and compassionate. *"TNSTEP showed me that true change happens when advocacy meets empathy,"* she said.

Her advice to other students interested in education, disability rights, or public policy: ***"Don't lose sight of the 'why' that brought you here. Progress may feel slow, but every step forward can change someone's life."***

We're grateful for the heart and insight Elena brought to our team.

UPCOMING OPPORTUNITY



February 23rd 12pm - 1pm EST

TNSTEP is excited to offer an overview of TN Pulse (formerly EasyIEP), the system schools use to create and manage IEPs, 504s, and other learning plans that support students with disabilities. During this session, we'll guide participants through a visual "How to Read an IEP" to help make the information clearer and more accessible. We'll also invite families to share which parts of the IEP process they'd like more support with so we can continue shaping trainings that meet their needs.

March 23rd 12pm - 1pm EST

Join us for Special Education 101, a foundational session designed to help families better understand the special education process. We'll explore how family engagement leads to better student outcomes, review parent rights under IDEA, discuss ways families can participate in education planning, and provide a brief overview of the IEP process.



STAY INFORMED

Webinars, Videos & Virtual Trainings

LEARN MORE >>

This year our mighty team of just seven people answered:

- **71,217** direct requests for support from parents, caregivers, and youth
- Delivered **111,053** free trainings and webinars for families, educators, and providers
- Shared **302,866** resources and materials at events, online, and by mail
- Provided self-advocacy tools to **5,534** youth preparing for life after high school
- Supported parents in **246** school meetings

SUPPORT TNSTEP'S MISSION

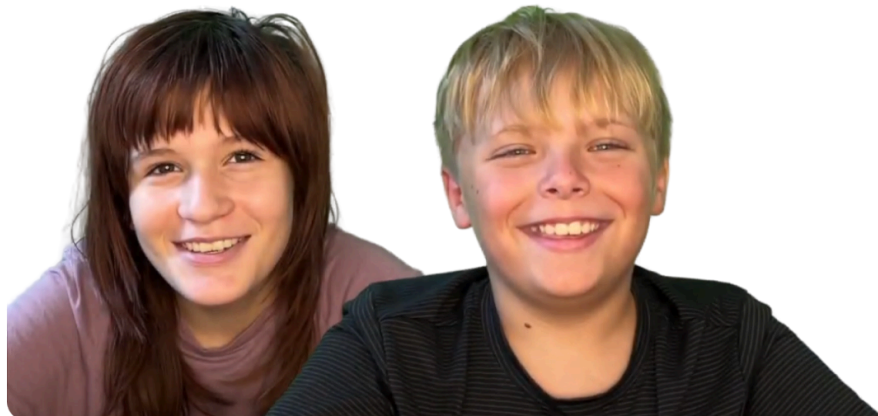
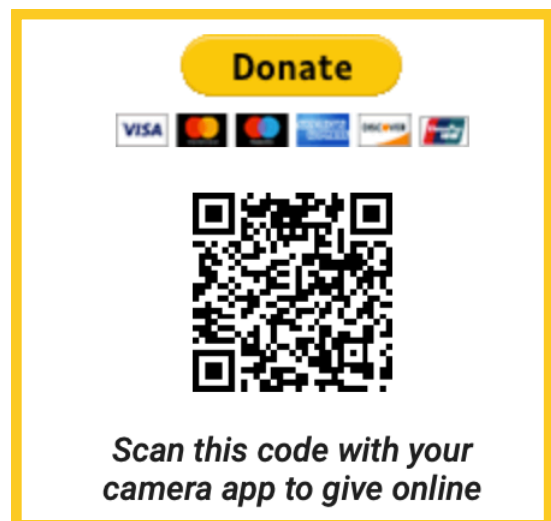
Families across Tennessee are counting on TNSTEP. Please help us continue to build a future where every voice is heard.

Your gift can do so much:

- \$35 helps provide a parent with personalized support and step-by-step guidance.
- \$350 provides training to a group of educators to improve inclusive practices.
- \$3,500 powers transition workshops and one-on-one coaching for youth.

The need is real, and your generosity can be the turning point for a family waiting for hope. Please consider making a tax-deductible gift.

YES!
I want to support TNSTEP



tnstep's Year in Review 2025



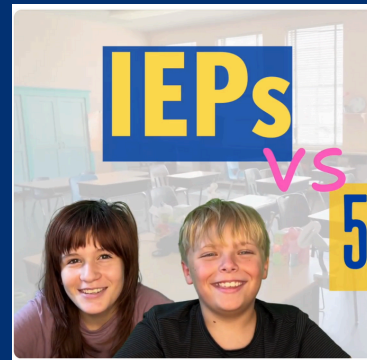
Strategic Partnerships and Community Engagement
Partnered with EdTrust and Senator McKenzie to host a youth-focused Zoom discussion, elevating youth voices and strengthening connections with state leadership.

Karen, Executive Director, represented TNSTEP at the **EdTrust Round Table**, contributing to meaningful training around education equity and policy impacting students with disabilities.



Program Enhancements and Achievements
Expanded TNSTEP's multimedia outreach through the creation of mission and awareness videos in Tennessee's top four languages, produced in partnership with the Tennessee Disability Coalition (TDC) to ensure accessibility for families statewide.

Launched a Family Engagement and Special Education video series as part of the TN-TAN network, providing families with clear, accessible information about navigating special education.



Advocacy and Leadership
Director of Middle TN Services, Patricia, participated in a national **Deaf-Blind initiative**, contributing to conversations and strategies that address educational access for children who are deaf-blind and their families.

Educational and Training Initiatives
Participated in MegaConference, connecting with educators, advocates, and partners to strengthen collaboration and share best practices.

Launched a quarterly Early Childhood Lunch and Learn webinar series in partnership with DDA-TEIS, providing training and resources for both families and educators.

Government Affairs and Policy Engagement
Advanced the work of TNSTEP's Government Affairs Committee, strengthening advocacy efforts and increasing engagement with policymakers to support students with disabilities and their families.



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

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Donate



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