

Ways to Connect with People with Disabilities

“Churches in Knoxville should be the most welcoming places to people affected by disability. In Luke 14, Jesus says, ‘Go out into the highways and byways and compel them’--people with disabilities—‘to come in, that my house may be filled.’”

~Laura Payne, Area Director of Joni and Friends Knoxville

Make a Difference Through Prayer

- Pray for the health and well-being of those with disabilities in our community and their families/caregivers.
- Pray that people with disabilities are accepted, supported and included in our community.
- Pray for the staff and finances of agencies that are serving the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of people affected by disability.
- Pray that people with disabilities will be empowered through work opportunities and appropriate services to live with dignity, sufficiency and joy.
- Pray for more congregations to model love that includes all persons, and to get involved in serving and advocating with those who are disabled.
- Praise God for the unique blessings that people with different abilities bring to our congregations and neighborhoods.

Make a Difference Through Your Life

- Educate yourself about various disabilities. Don't make assumptions about someone's mental capacity because they are in a wheelchair, or because they have difficulty communicating.
- Meditate on Scripture passages relating to people with disabilities, especially in the ministry of Jesus.
- People with disabilities are not looking for pity; they want to be accepted as an equal member of the community, and expected to contribute. Recognize that they have gifts of value to offer to the church and community.
- Reach out to someone with a disability in your congregation, workplace or neighborhood, and make a new friend. Focus on what you have in common and enjoy doing together, not how they are "different."
- Offer support to caregivers of people with disabilities through respite care, or through caring gestures such as delivering a meal or a gift certificate for a cleaning service.
- Learn sign language, and volunteer at Knoxville Center for the Deaf or Tennessee School for the Deaf. Offer translation services to hospitals, community groups and social service agencies, and at your church.
- Are you a Christian businessperson? In collaboration with the Creating Homes Initiative (481-6170 x 1156), you can fill job openings with qualified people with disabilities.

Make a Difference Through Your Church

Create an inclusive, accessible church environment:

- Assess how physically accessible and relationally welcoming your church is for people with disabilities. Consider ways to enhance your accessibility for people with wheelchairs, hearing or sight impairments or other disabilities.

- Commit to include and minister to people with disabilities in your church. Join Joni and Friends' Disability Ministry Roundtable (540-3860) to learn about disability ministry, network with other churches for training and support, and participate in area-wide activities for people with disabilities and their families, such as the annual Luke 14 Dinner.
- Invite a speaker to your church to share about the experience of living with a disability and the role of people with disabilities in the Christian community.
- Be intentional about inviting people with disabilities to share in the ministry of the church through volunteer opportunities suited to their gifts, interests and abilities. When promoting church-wide service opportunities, include options that are disability-friendly.
- Organize a support group for family members and caretakers of people with disabilities, and surround this group with the love, prayers and practical support of the larger church.

Respond to the needs of people with disabilities:

- Does your church have a handicap-accessible van? Connect with a ministry that serves people with disabilities and make the van available throughout the week to transport people to appointments and errands.
- People who have experienced an injury, stroke or disabling disease can often remain living in their home if it is modified for accessibility. Start or connect with a ministry to provide modifications such as wheelchair ramps, bathroom accommodations, and safety rails.
- Consider starting a "Care Givers Day Out" program (similar to a "Mom's Day Out" ministry), to allow parents or caregivers much-needed respite time while providing fun, enriching activities for the person in their care.
- Finding suitable child care is a struggle for many parents of young children with disabilities. Consider starting a specialized daycare or after-school program at your church, or provide support to enable an existing child care program to expand its services to include children with disabilities.
- People with a disability are at significant risk of physical or sexual abuse, but most goes unreported. Offer confidential counseling and support services to people with a disability who have been victims of abuse, and walk with victims through the reporting process, which can be painful and confusing. Train church staff to become familiar with the signs of abuse.
- Host a community-awareness event about disabilities (consider October, the National *Disability* Employment *Awareness* Month).

Make a Difference as a Volunteer

Here is a sample of ways to connect with organizations that serve people with disabilities:

disABILITY Resource Center: 637-3666, <http://www.drctn.org>

Works to empower people with disabilities to live full, independent lives within the community.

- Join the "Ramps and Rails" project to install handrails or build ramps for people with disabilities.
- Assist participants in seeking and keeping jobs, or offer classes such as cooking, fitness, or crafts.
- Help with special events like "Walk, Rock N' Roll with a Twist" and the Beep Baseball Tournament.

East Tennessee Technology Access Center, Inc.: 219-0130, www.discoveret.org/ettac

Enables people with disabilities in East Tennessee to reach their potential for participating in mainstream society through innovative uses of technology.

- Pick up and deliver donations of medical equipment such as wheelchairs, walkers and shower chairs.

- Adapt toys for children with disabilities who can't use their hands to play with toys, or modify household items needed by seniors or people with disabilities for daily living (training is provided).
- Participate in year-round HeartSong Center programs including art and music classes, music camp, the eXceptional Orchestra, Learning about Freedom classes, and KidsFest.
- Mentor young adults with disabilities -- volunteer mentors who also have a disability are especially appreciated.

Goodwill Industries: 588-8567, <http://www.gwiktn.org>

Provides vocational services and employment opportunities to people with disabilities and other barriers to employment. Offers training programs such as computer training, driver's education, Certified Nurse's Assistant training, and GED preparation.

- Help sort donations, price items, or stock shelves in one of multiple thrift stores around Knox County.
- Assist with special events such as the Vintage Fashion Show, Fire and Rescue Challenge, or Morristown Softball Tournament.

Joni and Friends Knoxville: 540-3860, <http://www.joniandfriends.org>

Serves people and their families affected by any type of disability, and equips churches and individuals to reach out to those with disabilities.

- Serve as a short term missionary at the Annual Family Retreat.
- Families: Volunteer for the Special Delivery program and deliver books, CDs and other gifts to people with disabilities.
- Families: Serve as a volunteer at special events such as "fun nights," respite nights for caregivers, or the annual Luke 14 Dinner, which connects those with disabilities and their families with welcoming churches.

Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic: 482-3496, <http://www.rfbd.org/RUUS/tn/index.htm>

Provides people with print disabilities the books they need to learn and succeed in their education and vocation. Volunteers record books in accessible digital format on CD and downloadable audio textbooks. Volunteers are asked to attend a short orientation and studio tour.

- Volunteers are needed who enjoy reading and working with textbooks for students from Kindergarten through post-college. Especially welcome are readers proficient in math, science, finance, accounting, computer science, foreign languages, and other technical areas.
- Other volunteer roles besides reading include checking, bookmarking and audio editors.
- Serve on fundraising, special events and educational outreach committees to generate resources and awareness.

Special Olympics: 661-7440 or 789-3957, <http://www.knoxvillespecialolympics.org>

Provides year-round free sports training and athletic competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them opportunities to develop physical fitness and strength of character, to build friendships, to share gifts and skills, and to celebrate their own and others' accomplishments.

- Sponsor a Knoxville-area Special Olympics athlete. Athletes are never charged a fee to participate.
- Help out at Special Olympic events, or simply come to cheer on the athletes.

- Families: Collect quality sports equipment to donate.

Therapeutic Riding Academy of Knoxville: 922-8223, <http://www.traktn.org>

A horseback riding academy for children with disabilities, providing “whole treatment” of mind, body and soul through physical, occupational, nutritional and speech-language therapies.

- Lead horses during therapeutic sessions for children with disabilities or walk next to the children on horseback.
- Assist with the setup and cleanup for sessions, exercise the horses, or help children with the grooming of the horses. If you have veterinary or farrier skills, donate time to the horses' care.
- Provide a permanent location to avoid having to use boarding facilities for the horses.
- Families: Sponsor a specific student or horse.

Other Volunteer Opportunities

Following is a list of additional organizations that serve people with disabilities in the Knoxville area.

Many of these organizations welcome volunteers. Ask about opportunities to:

- Provide transportation for those with disabilities to appointments, errands, jobs and church.
- Become a friend to someone with a disability – schedule regular times to visit, call, or take them to a special event.
- Teach a hobby, lead a sports or exercise activity, or organize social events.
- Provide help with building maintenance, landscaping, clerical work or other tasks.
- Host special events or fundraisers.
- Use your special skills (e.g., carpentry, physical and occupational therapy, legal, counseling, or medical skills) to supply needed services to people with disabilities.

American Coalition of Amputees: 524-8772, <http://www.amputee-coalition.org>

Reaches out to people with limb loss to empower them through education, support and advocacy.

Autism Society of America: 824-2897, www.asaetc.org

Educates, advocates, and raises awareness to promote life-long opportunity and acceptance for all individuals within the autism spectrum and their families.

Center on Disability and Employment (University of Tennessee): 974-9400, cde@tennessee.edu,

<http://www.cde.tennessee.edu>

Provides research and outreach services to advance inclusion of people with disabilities in employment.

The Corporate Connections program links employers with referrals for qualified job candidates and provides follow up services throughout the employment process.

Cerebral Palsy Center of Knoxville: 523-0491, <http://www.cpcenter.org>

Empowers adults with cerebral palsy and other developmental disabilities to live meaningful lives as fully

participating members of the community. Offers a range of services, including family support services, group homes and home-based assistance.

Christian Church Foundation for the Handicapped: 546-5921, <http://www.ccfh.org>

Offers training, resources and encouragement to enable people to minister effectively to those with disabilities. Provides job training, residential options and other services for people with developmental disabilities, as well as opportunities for social interaction and spiritual growth.

Disability Law and Advocacy Center of Tennessee: 888-852-2852, <http://www.dlactn.org>

Advocates for the rights of Tennesseans with disabilities to ensure they have an equal opportunity to be productive and respected members of our society.

Donated Dental Services (National Foundation of Dentistry for the Handicapped): 888-426-7379, <http://www.nfdh.org>

Serves individuals who are elderly, chronically ill or have a significant disability, who cannot afford needed extensive dental treatment (more than just a cleaning and check-up).

Down Syndrome Awareness Group of East Tennessee: 905-2968, <http://www.dsagtn.org>

Provides information and support to families of individuals with Down Syndrome. Organizes the Buddy Walk to promote appreciation and inclusion of people with Down Syndrome each October, during National Down Syndrome Awareness Month.

Fort Sanders Educational Developmental Center: 594-5035,

<http://www.fortsanders.knoxschools.org>

Provides special education services for students, mainly preschool, in a partial-day program. A Comprehensive Development Classroom serves multi-handicapped, medically fragile children (ages 6-22) in a specialized setting.

Helen Ross McNabb Developmental Disabilities Services: 637-9711, <http://www.mcabbcenter.org>

Serves individuals with mental retardation and/or other developmental disabilities through the Psychopharmacology Clinic, helping them establish stability and take advantage of available community services.

Independent Opportunities, Inc.: 932-6595, <http://www.ioi-tulsa.com>

Provides support that gives people with developmental disabilities the opportunity to explore choices, experience community, and follow their dreams.

Knoxville Center For the Deaf: 579-0832, <http://www.kcdtn.org>

Improves quality of life for the hearing impaired by helping them become more integrated into the larger community. Provides 24-hour sign language interpreting services for deaf and deaf-blind persons.

Muscular Dystrophy Association: 588-1632, <http://www.mda.org>

Provides clinics, support groups, summer camps, equipment loans and much more to those with muscular dystrophy.

Open Arms Care: 694-8469, <http://www.openarmscare.org>

A nonprofit that provides Intermediate Care Facility Services for adults and children with mental retardation and developmental disabilities in a non-institutional, home setting.

Open Door Ministry: 437-7766, <http://www.opendoorstn.com>

Dedicated to identifying "accessibility-friendly" businesses, restaurants, sports and recreational programs, and support groups in the Knoxville area. Includes a list of churches with accessibility features and disability ministries.

Patricia Neal Rehabilitation Center: 541-1446, <http://www.patneal.org>

A recognized leader in East Tennessee for rehabilitating stroke, spinal cord, and brain injury patients.

Sertoma Center: 524-5555, <http://www.sertoma.com>

Helps adults with developmental disabilities find and keep jobs. Offers individualized programs of training and support, interdisciplinary coordination of services, public awareness and education.

Shangri-La Therapeutic Academy of Riding (STAR): 988-4711, <http://www.rideatstar.org>

Provides individualized instruction in therapeutic horseback riding to persons with disabilities, including grooming, saddling, and learning riding skills and other options.

STEP (Support and Training for Exceptional Parents): 800-280-STEP, <http://www.tnstep.org>

A statewide program to provide free information, advocacy training, and support services to parents of children eligible for special education services.

Sunshine Industries: 546-9431

Provides residential care, job training, and job placement for adults with mental retardation who have sufficient social, physical, and cognitive skills to meet minimum production requirements.

Tennessee Infant Parent Services School (TIPS): 579-3099

Provides in-home services on a weekly basis to families of infants and toddlers with special needs. Works in partnership with parents to address their fears and to provide the knowledge, skills and support to encourage their children's growth and development.

Tennessee Respite Network (Tennessee Voices for Children): 1-888-269-7855, <http://www.tnvoices.org>

Provides information and referrals to local agencies and individuals for respite services for families with children with any type of disability. Families may also be eligible for financial assistance for respite care.

Tennessee School for the Deaf: 579-2500, <http://www.tsdeaf.org>

Offers an individualized, comprehensive educational program that prepares students academically, vocationally, physically, emotionally and morally to meet the daily challenges of adult life.

How to Learn More:

- Christian Church Foundation for the Handicapped (546-5921, <http://www.ccfh.org>) provides training to churches around the country to set up welcoming Sunday School programs for persons with disabilities. They offer *Exceptional Teaching Online*, an innovative, interactive program that guides the implementation of a disability ministry.
- Read Jim Pierson, *No Disabled Souls* (Standard Publishing, 1998), available from Christian Church Foundation for the Handicapped.
- The Therapeutic Riding Academy of Knoxville (693-5973) offers volunteer training and educational programs.
- The disABILITY Resource Center (637-3666) offers training on Disability Sensitivity, Special Education, and other disability related subjects.
- Johnson Bible College offers an online Certificate in Disability Ministry, in conjunction with Christian Church Foundation for the Handicapped (<http://www.ccfh.org/education/certificate.php>).
- The website for the City of Knoxville provides a list of links to sites that provide information on disability policy and research (<http://www.ci.knoxville.tn.us/newcomers/ada.asp>).
- Several websites offer lists of regional disability services, including: About Knoxville (<http://www.knoxvilletennessee.com/disability.html>), Disability Resources Monthly (<http://www.disabilityresources.org/TENNESSEE.html>), Open Doors (<http://www.opendoorstn.com>), and the Pellissippi State Services for Students With Disabilities (<http://pstcc15.pstcc.edu/departments/swd/links.html#local>).