



Thank you for joining us. See you next year!

# WELCOME TO DEAL 2024

Celebrating our 10th Annual Disability Employment Awareness Luncheon

October 11, 2024  
Music City Center | Nashville, TN



## Who is Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT)?

DRT is a non-profit agency that **assists, advocates for, and protects the rights of Tennesseans living with disabilities and/or mental illness.**

Thank you all for joining us today at our 10th Annual Disability Employment Awareness Luncheon!

As some of you may know, I'll be retiring from DRT in March. So, I'm especially grateful to have this opportunity to say, just one more time, thank you for being here and for supporting our mission.

Today's luncheon is about more than just gathering together, it's about providing the inspiration and tools to change the narrative around disability and employment. We want to ensure that every person with a disability who wants to work can find meaningful employment. And for employers, it's about learning how to recruit, hire, and retain talented Tennesseans with disabilities.

With your support, we've been able to continue to provide free legal advocacy services across all 95 Tennessee counties. A heartfelt thank you to our incredible partners and collaborators (many of whom are in this room!) for working with us to protect the rights of Tennesseans living with disabilities and/or mental illness.

We are in this together!



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Primm'.

**LISA PRIMM**  
Executive Director  
Disability Rights Tennessee



# ORDER OF EVENTS

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## WELCOME

Lisa Primm, Executive Director, Disability Rights Tennessee

## INTRODUCTION OF PROGRAM

Clancey Hopper

## SNEAK PEAK - TRUELOVE: A FILM

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Keith Richards, Founder of Taziki's and HOPE Project

## PANEL: HOLIDAY INN VANDERBILT

Gena Shearon  
Jack Neinaber  
Kate Deitzer  
Dawn Howard

## SPOTLIGHT SPEAKER

Sundi Wright, TN Department of Human Resources

## DOOR PRIZE

Clancey Hopper

## DRT SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT AND CLOSING

Lisa Primm, Executive Director, Disability Rights Tennessee

# MEET THE DRT FAMILY

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## DISABILITY RIGHTS TENNESSEE STAFF

Nicole Allen	Johnnie Hatten	Stacie Price
Becky Allen	Debra Haynes	Lisa Primm
Eric Allman	Samantha Jacobs	Karen Ramos
Ann Anderson	Kayla Jefferies	Dalmys Sánchez
Anna Bass	Zoë Jamail	Lee Sherwood
Leslie Beach	Jeremiah Jones	Jennifer Shilling
Keitha Broyles	Craig Lemak	Stephanie Siegel
Holland Camara	Shardon Love	Jamie Stuart
Denise Capers	April Mancino-Rosete	Gabriel Tanguay
Melissa Collins	Danita Marsh	Jeff Vaden
Alex Cooper	William Moore	Tiffany Walker
Kelsey Craig	Dawn Munroe	J White
Jack Derryberry	Chris Nipper	Tina Williams
Brittany Farrington-Beasley	Alyssa Peacock	Freeman World
Rick Hall		

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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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# THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

## EMPLOYMENT CHAMPION



## EMPLOYMENT FRIEND



## TABLE HOSTS AND DONORS

BlueCare Tennessee  
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Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities  
Tennessee Disability Coalition  
Tennessee Human Rights Commission  
Vanderbilt University Medical Center

# KEYNOTE SPEAKER KEITH RICHARDS

Keith Richards and his wife Amy founded Taziki's in 1998. He served as President from May 1998 until December 2012, and then served as the Chief Franchise Officer from June 2012 to June 2017. Keith has returned to manage the flagship market in Birmingham AL, and continues to lead our culinary R+D and the HOPE Project, Taziki's signature charity. Before creating Taziki's, Keith Richards worked under the direction of Frank Sitt at Highlands Bar and Grill- which won the elusive 2018 James Beard Foundation Award for the most outstanding restaurant in America. Today, Keith and Amy and their two sets of twins live in Birmingham, AL, where Keith serves on the Shelby County Chamber Board and advances the cause of employing special needs students in Birmingham and across the country.



Our purpose is to help people flourish. We see an opportunity to help students with disabilities and at-risk youth in every community. We give them jobs. We teach them how to contribute. We give them hope.

# SPOTLIGHT SPEAKER SUNDI WRIGHT

**Sundi Wright** serves as a Human Resources Program Administrator for the Department of Human Resources (DOHR). In her role, she provides strategic direction and oversight for the Office of People, Performance and Culture.

Prior to her current role, Sundi was the Diversity and Inclusion Program Manager for Consolidated Nuclear Security, LLC the management and operating contractor for The Pantex Plant and Y-12 National Security Complex. She has over 27 years of experience in human resources. Sundi is retired from the United States Army.

Sundi is a trained mediator, a certified facilitator, a graduate of the Department of Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute and the TN Government Executive Institute (TGEI). She holds the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI) certification of Senior Professional Human Resources (SPHR). Sundi earned her Master's degree in Human Resources Management and her Bachelor's degree in Business Administration.



# DEAL 2024 HOST CLANCEY HOPPER

Hello, my name is **Clancey Hopper** and I am so honored to be the Emcee for this year's annual Disability Employment Awareness Luncheon for DRT. I have been in Tennessee for 11 years. I was born with a genetic condition called Williams Syndrome and I am a Board of Trustees member for the Williams Syndrome Association. I am a graduate of Project SEARCH at Vanderbilt University Medical Center class of 2014-2015. I am also a graduate of the 2016-2017 Partners in Policymaking. I also served as the governor appointed member of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities for 8 years.

My most favorite job I have ever had was being a tour guide at the Grand Ole Opry for 4 1/2 years. I love singing, traveling, and serving in various capacities at my church. Thank you so much for this amazing opportunity I am truly grateful.



# PANEL #1: HOLIDAY INN VANDERBILT

*Some of you may remember Zack Nienaber telling his employment story with Holiday Inn Vanderbilt at DEAL 2019. Zack, Gena Shearon, Kate Deitzer, and Dawn Howard join us to give an update and discuss inclusive hiring and the important role of advocacy in the employment process.*

**Zack Neinaber** began his employment journey as a Project SEARCH Embassy Suites intern in 2017. As an intern, Zack cultivated the soft employability skills he needed to be successful in the hotel industry and gained hands-on experience. After graduating from Project SEARCH in 2018, Zack became employed in the laundry department at the Vanderbilt Holiday Inn where he has continued to build his skill set. When COVID hit and many employees were furloughed, Zack made it his mission to get back to work at the Holiday Inn at the first available opportunity. His tenacity and perseverance have served as an inspiration to others, and he was recently named the Employee of the Month “Heart of the House” at the Holiday Inn at Vanderbilt. Zack is thriving in employment and has accomplished so much through his efforts in Project SEARCH and with his employment with the Holiday Inn at Vanderbilt. Zack is the son of Cynthia and Scott Bowker and Kirk and Kristy Nienaber.

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**Gena Shearon** has been the Human Resources Director at Holiday Inn Nashville (Vanderbilt) for over nine years. She also serves on the Advisory Boards for Project SEARCH and Metro Nashville Public Schools’ Hospitality Industry. Growing up as a self-proclaimed “Navy brat,” Gena had the opportunity to travel extensively before graduating from Cumberland University. She takes great pride in being “Gigi” to 15 grandchildren (soon to be 16) and hosting exchange students for over 15 years with her husband Kevin.

**Dawn Howard** has worked at Progress for almost 21 years and has served as a job coach for the Project SEARCH program. Dawn has not only prepared people to work but has also changed lives. Dawn is kind and empathetic, but also sets very high expectations for these young people that she works with.

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**Kathryn (Kate) Deitzer** graduated from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA earning both an undergraduate and masters degree in Special Education. Counseling has also been a continued field of study for Kate. She has over three decades of experience working in special education and the psychiatric fields. Kate began her career as a teacher in a private school in Pittsburgh, PA for students with emotional disturbances. Kate has facilitated groups of all types giving her a keen insight into group dynamics. She has served as the school principal at Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital. Other experience includes working as a transition consultant for the Tennessee State Department of Education, President of Arc of Davidson County for three years and coaches teachers, developmentally delayed students, and families in a post secondary program. In addition, Kate also provides private academic tutoring. Most recently, Kate earned the certification of Certified Autism Informed Professional.

# DO YOU KNOW COMMON BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT?

## 1. Tackling bias in the hiring process:

Checking the box to disclose your disability should NOT be a reason for an employer to cast your application aside. Every candidate brings their own unique skills and talents to the workplace. Living with a disability or mental illness doesn't change that.

**Let's recognize ability, not assumptions.**

## 2. Addressing fear of judgement:

Judgement can come at any stage of the employment process from submitting an application, to interviewing, all the way down to performance reviews and promotion consideration. A welcoming, inclusive attitude goes a long way in supporting everyone's success.

**Inclusivity ensures success, for all.**

## 3. Breaking down accessibility barriers in the workplace:

Accessibility barriers can happen at any stage of your journey as an employee. One example of this is a business website or job board that has poor color contrast, no captions on videos, or inaccessible online forms. Whether a prospective employee can depend on a wheelchair ramp, automatic doors, or accessible restrooms might be the defining factor in applying for a job.

**Let's build accessible pathways, not roadblocks.**

## 4. Encouraging reasonable accommodations:

Providing reasonable accommodations ensures every employee can perform their best. Providing these adjustments isn't just a legal requirement- its an investment in a diverse and thriving workplace.

**Investing in the workplace is a win for all.**

# TRANSFORMING

## LIVES, BUSINESSES & COMMUNITIES



**Helping transform lives of Tennesseans through Vocational Rehabilitation, the Tennessee Technology Access Program, Community Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers, Tennessee Rehabilitation Center—Smyrna, and more.**

**For more information about the Tennessee Department of Human Services and TDHS Rehabilitation Services, visit <http://www.tn.gov/humanservices>**

**Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

Telephone: (615) 313-4891

TTY: (615) 313-5695

TTY (Long Distance): 1-800-270-1349



Department of  
**Human Services**

# 10 WAYS TO FOSTER INCLUSION YEAR ROUND

## NOTES

1. Gather Ideas from Your Corporate Disability Employee Resource Group
2. Hold a National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) Kickoff Event in October
3. Host a Disability Mentoring Day
4. Sponsor a “Lunch and Learn” Series About Disability Issues
5. Provide Volunteer Opportunities to Your Employees
6. Display Posters Promoting Disability Inclusion
7. Offer American Sign Language Training Classes to Your Employees
8. Interview Students with Disabilities During Campus Recruiting Trips
9. Host a Disability 101 Event for Employees
10. Incorporate Disability Into Your Onboarding Processes

### DID YOU KNOW?

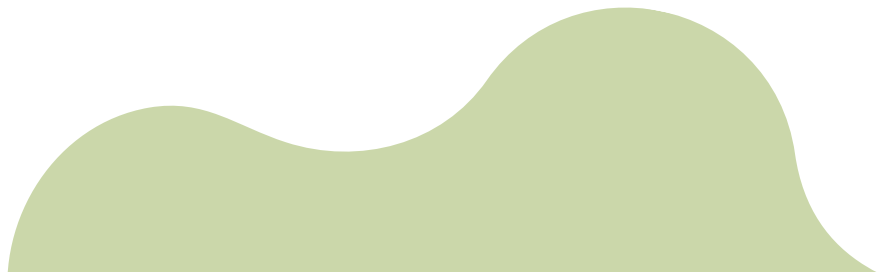
DRT has a whole resource page dedicated to employment. Find it here:  
[www.DisabilityRightsTN.org/Resources](http://www.DisabilityRightsTN.org/Resources)



*NOTES*



*NOTES*



# STAY IN TOUCH


Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT) is the designated Protection & Advocacy (P&A) system in Tennessee, proudly serving people living with disabilities and/or mental illness across all 95 counties.


Visit our website, [www.DisabilityRightsTN.org](http://www.DisabilityRightsTN.org) to view all of our resources and learn more!

All services offered by DRT are **FREE** of charge.

We use interpreters to speak with you in your language, including ASL.

## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

 @DisabilityRightsTN

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 @TNRights

## Who is Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT)?

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I know, support, or love someone who needs help.  
Can I still contact DRT?

Yes! Email or Call:  
[GetHelp@DisabilityRightsTN.org](mailto:GetHelp@DisabilityRightsTN.org)  
1-800-342-1660 OR 615-916-4437