



# THE LEAF



QUARTERLY EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER



## CELEBRATING 70 YEARS

### A Memorable Celebration: Emory Valley Center’s 70th Anniversary Breakfast

We were thrilled by the wonderful turnout at our 70th Anniversary Breakfast on Friday, November 7th! It was truly an honor to celebrate this remarkable milestone with so many friends, partners, and supporters.

A heartfelt thank-you to our Breakfast Sponsor, The Maven, for their generous support in making this event possible. We also extend our sincere appreciation to our Emcee, Gene Patterson, and our outstanding speakers: Naomi Asher (The Maven), Becky Dodson (Past Board Chair), Ray Smith (Oak Ridge Historian), Jim Dodson (Oak Ridge Mayor Pro Tem), Randy McNally (Tennessee Lt. Governor), and Jennifer Enderson (Emory Valley President).

Thank you to everyone who joined us to honor 70 years of inclusion, service, and community impact. Your continued support means the world to us – and we couldn’t have reached this milestone without you!



Members of Emory Valley Center recently attended the 2025 CQL Conference, Go The Distance!, held in Philadelphia.

CQL – The Council on Quality and Leadership – is a national organization dedicated to promoting excellence in person-centered services and supports for people with disabilities. Through its partnership with agencies like Emory Valley Center, CQL helps advance best practices that prioritize choice, dignity, and inclusion.

During the conference, our team joined professionals from across the country to exchange ideas, explore innovative strategies, and discover new ways to enhance the quality of life for the people we support.

We’re proud to bring this knowledge and inspiration back to Tennessee as we continue to “go the distance” for the individuals and families we serve every day.



Emory Valley Center is proud to celebrate the exceptional achievements of four distinguished team members who were recognized at the 2025 Tennessee Community Organizations (TNCO) Conference. Each honoree exemplifies the Center’s core values of inclusion, compassion, and dedication to supporting individuals in living meaningful and fulfilling lives.

The award recipients are as follows:

- Tawnee – Individual Achievement Award
- Jennifer Enderson – Executive Director of the Year
- Karen Olson – Early Intervention Excellence Award
- Kirsten Purinton – Outstanding Direct Support Professional (DSP) Award

These recognitions reflect the outstanding commitment and professionalism of our staff, whose contributions continue to advance Emory Valley Center’s mission and positively impact the lives of those we serve.

We extend our sincere congratulations and appreciation to each of these honorees for their exemplary leadership and dedication. Their accomplishments represent the very best of our organization and the broader community we serve.

Dear Team,

As the holiday season rolls in, I just have to say – wow. What an incredible year it's been for all of us at Emory Valley Center! I'm so proud of what we've accomplished together and the energy, heart, and teamwork that fuel everything we do. Our annual Halloween party was an absolute blast – full of laughter, creativity, and community spirit.

It's moments like these that remind us how special it is to come together and just celebrate being us. This year also marked a huge milestone – Emory Valley's 70th anniversary! We kicked things off with a celebratory breakfast honoring seven decades of compassion, growth, and impact. It was such an inspiring way to reflect on how far we've come and the amazing people who continue to shape our story.

And speaking of milestones... our Little Learning Lab just turned one! In its first year, this program has already made a big difference – helping our youngest learners grow, explore, and reach new heights.

We're also sending a massive shoutout to our incredible teammates who were recognized at the 2025 Tennessee Community Organizations (TNCO) Conference:

- Tawnee – Individual Achievement Award
- Karen Olson – Early Intervention Excellence Award
- Kirsten Purinton – Outstanding Direct Support Professional (DSP) Award

Each of these amazing folks lives out Emory Valley's values of inclusion, compassion, and dedication every single day.

A few of our team members also had the chance to represent us at the 2025 CQL Conference – Go The Distance! in Philadelphia. They came back fired up with new ideas, connections, and inspiration to keep pushing forward in quality and innovation.

As we look ahead, let's continue to carry forward our values—Compassion, Inclusion, Value, Forward Thinking, and Quality—into everything we do. Thank you for being part of the Emory Valley Center family and for making a difference every single day.

With gratitude,  
Jennifer Enderson  
President, Emory Valley Center



## STAFF TENURE

Amanda Arndts  
Alexis Caldwell  
Paula Dickerson  
Kasey Foster  
Daniel Hammons  
Crystal Hicks  
Beverly Hines  
Jasmie King  
Zach McCarter  
Miranda McClain  
Robert McMahan  
Anna Moore  
Shawna Morgan  
Whitney Nunley  
Angela Osborne  
Joseph Reed  
Ethan Reynolds  
Kenda Roberts  
Charlie Rucker  
John Schubert  
Ann Shipperbottom  
Maria Silverio  
Erin Smith  
Trinity West  
Justin Williams



### Language Access Plan

*Added technology for interpreting services*

### Children Services Abuse Reporting

*Added unpaid admin leave if the target. May use PTO and will be paid if it comes back as unsubstantiated.*

**FOR MORE INFO PLEASE CONTACT  
KRISTEN.OTTO@EVCMAIL.ORG**

# ADVOCACY CORNER

NOVEMBER 2025

Advocacy is a crucial force in ensuring that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) receive the support, respect, and opportunities they deserve. Through effective advocacy, barriers to inclusion, education, healthcare, and employment are addressed, empowering people with IDD to achieve their fullest potential.

Families often face complex systems when seeking support for their loved ones with IDD. Advocacy plays a vital role in helping families navigate these challenges. Emory Valley Center offers dedicated advocacy services, guiding families through available programs, resources, and individualized support plans. By partnering with Emory Valley Center, families gain a strong ally—one that helps them understand their rights, access essential services, and ensure their loved one's voice is heard. Emory Valley Center's advocates are knowledgeable about local resources and can help families connect with educational, medical, and social services tailored to their needs. By working with these advocates, families gain valuable guidance and support ensuring their family members receive the best possible care and opportunities.

Emory Valley Center's commitment to advocacy fosters stronger, more inclusive communities where every person is valued. If you or someone you know could benefit from these services, reach out to Emory Valley Center to learn how advocacy can make a difference.

Sincerely,  
Mel Stanley  
Advocacy Specialist

## UPCOMING:

### OAK RIDGE WE ADAPT EVENTS



## RESOURCES

### Useful Links:

- <https://supporteddecisionmaking.org/> (Supported Decision Making)
- <https://supportforfamilies.org/supported-decision-making-an-overview/> (Supported Decision Making)
- <https://www.olmsteadrights.org/> (Rights)
- <https://www.justice.gov/elderjustice/guardianship-less-restrictive-options> (Alternatives to Conservatorship)
- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1178968536636589> (Facebook Group Family Connections)

## Promotions

Chandler Grove -  
HR Administrative Assistant  
Annette Woods -  
Professional Services  
Makeala Banks -  
Lead Teacher  
Rachel Strayer -  
Community Engagement  
Marketing Specialist  
Chris McCullough -  
Case Manager Assistant



## Staffing Updates

New Hires

DSP- 21

Finance- 2

LLL- 1

ELC- 3

CM- 2

Admin Asst- 1



# HUMAN RESOURCES



## Take Advantage of Our Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

At Emory Valley Center, we care about the well-being of every team member—not just at work, but in life. That’s why we offer the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a free and confidential resource available to all employees and their families.

The EAP is designed to provide support when you need it most. Whether you’re navigating personal challenges, seeking counseling, managing stress, or looking for tools to improve work-life balance, help is just a phone call or click away. The program also offers resources for financial planning, legal advice, family support, and more.

You don’t have to face life’s challenges alone—the EAP is here for you, anytime.

📞 Call 800-272-7255

🌐 Visit [www.guidanceresources.com](http://www.guidanceresources.com)

🔑 Use WEB ID: SymetraGR

Take advantage of this benefit and remember—you are never alone in finding the support you need.

## SPOOKY AND SPECTACULAR: EMORY VALLEY’S ANNUAL HALLOWEEN PARTY



The Emory Valley Center crew had an evening filled with spooktacular fun and laughter! Our Halloween celebration brought everyone together for a night packed with festive activities and community spirit. Staff and participants alike enjoyed a delicious spread of snacks and sweet treats, including plenty of candy to satisfy every sweet tooth.

The dance floor was buzzing with energy as everyone showed off their best moves to some favorite tunes. Of course, no Halloween party would be complete without a costume contest! From creative and funny to spooky and elaborate, the costumes were truly a sight to see.

It was a wonderful evening of joy, connection, and celebration—a perfect reminder of the creativity and togetherness that make Emory Valley Center such a special place. We can’t wait to do it all again next year!

# EVC HAPPENINGS

## All Abilities Fair



We had a wonderful time connecting with so many members of our community at the Oak Ridge All Abilities Fair. Thank you to everyone who visited our booth to learn more about Emory Valley Center and the programs we offer to support individuals of all abilities. We're honored to be part of such an inclusive, inspiring event that celebrates diversity and community connection.

## The Little Learning Lab Turns One!



In October, the Little Learning Lab celebrated its first anniversary!

Our young scientists had a blast dressing up as mad scientists, and the day was filled with fun and discovery!

We're incredibly proud of how much the Lab has grown in just one year. A heartfelt thank-you to our amazing staff, families, and community for your continued support — we couldn't have done it without you!

# GET INVOLVED

ARE YOU INTERESTED JOINING A COMMITTEE?



## AGENCY QUALITY TEAM

**Chair:** Kristen Otto, Vice President of Professional Services

**Focus:** Driving continuous improvement and service excellence

**Meets:** 4th Tuesday of every month at 1:30 PM in the Multi-Purpose Room

## DATA MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

**Chair:** Kristen Otto, Vice President of Professional Services

**Focus:** Ensuring data integrity and smart data use across the agency

**Meets:** Every 3rd month on a Tuesday – virtual only

## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

**Co-Chair:** Aaron Price, Vice President of Community Engagement, Casey Chumley HR

**Focus:** Boosting morale, culture, and workplace satisfaction

**Meets:** 3rd Wednesday of each month at 12:00 PM in the Multi-Purpose Room - lunch provided

## HIRING COMMITTEE

**Chair:** Kim Jeffers-Whitaker, Vice President of Human Resources

**Focus:** Supporting high-quality, inclusive recruitment

**Meets:** Every Tuesday at 9:00 AM in the Multi-Purpose Room (Hybrid option available)

**Note:** Currently open to Home Managers only

## EVENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

**Interim Chair:** Elizabeth Hawkins, Accreditation Specialist

**Focus:** Review of agency investigations and actions to move forward

**Meets:** 2nd Monday of each month at 10:00 AM in the Training Room

## IT COMMITTEE

**Chair:** Joe Reed, IT Specialist

**Focus:** Enhancing our technology systems and digital tools

**Meets:** 3rd Wednesday of every month at 1:00 PM in the Multi-Purpose Room

## SAFETY COMMITTEE

**Co-Chair:** Kevin Hicks, Executive Facilities Director and Kim Jeffers-Whitaker- VP of Human Resources

**Focus:** Promoting a safe, healthy, and compliant work environment

**Meets:** 3rd Thursday of every month at 2:00 PM in the Multi-Purpose Room



You Are Invited To

# THANKS GIVING

*Luncheon*

NOVEMBER

FRIDAY

21

11AM-1PM

2025

Gym at the Caldwell  
Thompson Building.



EMORY VALLEY CENTER

MAXIMIZING HUMAN ABILITIES



## Second Harvest Food Bank



Emory Valley Center is glad to share that Second Harvest food is available for both the people we support and our employees. When food is ready to pick up, a message will be sent through PHS email to let everyone know. If you would like to receive food, please go to the PSR area. Staff will help you sign in and answer a few required questions for Second Harvest. After that, you may choose the food items that are best for you and your family.

This program helps make sure everyone has access to healthy food, and we are grateful to be able to offer it. If there is a food item you are hoping to get, you may contact Crystal Hicks to see if it can be requested during the next order.



### MEET WITH YOUR RETIREMENT REPRESENTATIVE

Schedule a complimentary in-person Account Review today!  
 Appointments will be held on the last Wednesday of every month  
 at the Emory Valley Center Office location in Room 112!

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	8:00 am	8:30 am	9:00 am
					1	2	9:30 am	10:00 am	10:30 am
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11:00 am	11:30 am	12:00 pm
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	12:30 pm	2:30 pm	3:00 pm
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	3:30 pm	4:00 pm	4:30 pm
24	25	26	27	28	29	30			



**You can discuss questions such as:**

- How do I enroll in my account?
- How much should I save for retirement?
- Are pre-tax or Roth contributions best?
- How can I maximize Social Security?

### Instructions:

1. Scan QR Code
2. Select "Private Appointment" (25 mins)
3. Schedule Time

Planning for retirement is one of the most important steps you can take toward securing your financial future. To support you in making informed decisions, we have partnered with The Trust Company to offer in-person appointments where you can:

- Review your retirement plan and investment options
- Make or update your benefit elections
- Ask questions about your current savings strategy
- Receive guidance on long-term financial planning

Having a retirement plan in place is essential—it not only helps ensure financial stability in the future but also provides peace of mind today. Whether you are just starting to save, actively investing, or looking ahead to retirement, these appointments are a valuable opportunity to get personalized advice.

Appointments are available the last Wednesday of the Month . Please use the QR code on the attachment to reserve your time slot.