

**NEWS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release**

For more information contact:

Taylor Bostwick

(423) 320-3834

taylor\_bostwick@signalcenters.org

**Signal Centers Announces New Leadership in New Year**

*Nonprofit Creates Two Key Roles on Growing Executive Leadership Team*

**CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (Feb. 24, 2025)** **–**As Signal Centers continues to grow its local and statewide presence, the nonprofit organization has added two new leadership roles to its ranks.

Heather Hicks has been promoted to Executive Director of Statewide Services, and Christa J. Mannarino is moving into the role of Executive Director of Local Services.

These leadership additions will position Signal Centers for the future, helping it manage its growing statewide responsibility and workforce (which has reached more than 400 employees across 13 programs). The nonprofit’s comprehensive early childhood education and disability services focus on fostering lifelong learning and independence for all.

"As our organization grows, so does our responsibility to the individuals and families who rely on us” said Donna McConnico, CEO of Signal Centers. “The work we do is life-changing, and it is essential that we continue providing the highest quality services. Expanding our leadership team ensures we have the expertise, vision, and support needed to strengthen our infrastructure and further our mission with excellence and impact."

The two new roles were filled by internal promotions. Prioritizing leadership development is something that Signal Centers values as an employer and that contributes to its healthy culture. Last year, the organization was recognized for its positive work environment by the Nonprofit Times. It was one of only 50 organizations in the country to be named to the Best Nonprofits to Work For list, ranking 8th in the large nonprofit category.

**Heather Hicks**

Hicks was promoted from Chief Officer of Statewide Initiatives and Director of the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) network. In her new role as Executive Director of Statewide Services, she will provide leadership, advocacy, support, and fiscal management to the organization’s statewide programs, including CCR&R and Child Care WAGE$ Tennessee. These programs are Signal Center’s two largest, comprised of 250+ staff across the state.

As both an author and conference presenter, Hicks is a nationally recognized leader in the early childhood education field through her career-long efforts to improve child care quality, access, and affordability. She first joined Signal Centers in 2008 as the Strengthening Families Network Coordinator. Prior, she served as the project manager for an Early Childhood Educator Professional Development grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Hicks holds a Master of Education degree in Early Childhood from the University of Tennessee Chattanooga.

**Christa J. Mannarino**

Mannarino’s new role is Executive Director of Local Services. She will have overall strategic and operational responsibility for all local programs, including Adult Day Services, Assistive Technology, Hart Gallery, Family Forward, Children’s Services, Developmental Therapy, Early Intervention, Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, Work Ready, and The Speech & Hearing Center. Mannarino is charged with ensuring those programs bring the agency’s mission and vision to fruition and adhere to a high standard of quality.

Mannarino brings with her 25 years of nonprofit leadership experience leading teams within complex organizations to reach goals. She has extensive skills in strategic planning, facilitation and fundraising. She was most recently the Chief Marketing and Development Officer for Signal Centers. Prior, Mannarino was the Founder/Principal of Mannarino Consulting and worked as a partner for Community Consultants. She has also held various development roles at Cleveland State Community College, Girls Preparatory School, and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. She began her nonprofit career as the Executive Director of the Association for Visual Arts. Mannarino holds a Bachelor of Fine Art from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

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**Signal Centers**

Signal Centers has been a cornerstone of the Chattanooga community since 1957. Its comprehensive early childhood education and disability services focus on fostering lifelong learning and independence for all. From one classroom of nine children with cerebral palsy to a statewide organization comprised of 13 distinct programs, the nonprofit’s mission of self-sufficiency remains unchanged. For more information, visit [signalcenters.org](https://signalcenters.org).