



2025 Annual Report

 **SIGNAL
CENTERS**
BUILDING FUTURES, CHANGING LIVES



A Word From Our CEO

Twenty-one years ago, a group of volunteers called Friends of Special Children came alongside Signal Centers to support children with disabilities and their families. Their love, dedication, and steady presence have strengthened our programs and lifted countless families. I truly could not imagine this journey without them.

This October, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of All aBout Children (ABC). The impact of this event is written across our campus and in the lives of those we serve. Because of their vision, children now play on a nature-filled playground, enjoy an indoor recreation space, explore adventure trails alive with birds and butterflies, and gather under a beautiful pavilion.

Twenty events. Twenty projects. Thousands of lives touched.

When I reflect on how far we've come, my heart is full! Signal Centers has grown from a small community of helpers into a powerful force for hope, inclusion, and opportunity. None of it would be possible without you—our partners, our friends, our board, our staff, and our champions. Together, we are shaping a future where possibility becomes reality.

Donna McConico

Before



After



All aBout Children

A milestone honoring 20 years of partnership and impact





Local Programs

Children's Services	1957
Adult Day Services	1978
Assistive Technology Services	1991
Family Forward	2015
Summer Camps	2015
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library	2021
Hart Gallery	2021
Work Ready	2023
The Speech & Hearing Center	2024

The backbone of Signal Centers is our local programming. Our footprint in the Chattanooga community, where it all began in 1957 with a classroom of nine children, has grown to include 11 programs. After 68 years, we continue to strive to create a path to lifelong self-sufficiency for everyone. All fundraising efforts support our local initiatives that carry out that mission every day.



Hamilton County Schools has partnered with Signal Centers for decades to provide high-quality, developmentally appropriate services for the county's youngest learners. Through this collaboration, about 50 preschool students each year learn in an inclusive, nurturing, and structured environment.

Signal Centers is committed to ensuring every child, regardless of ability, has access to meaningful early-learning opportunities and the support needed to thrive. Our focus on early intervention, strong relationships, and family-centered care makes for a valuable partnership with Hamilton County Schools.

“This relationship is personal for me. In my role as exceptional education preschool coordinator for Hamilton County Schools, I work closely with Signal Centers, and I am also the grandmother of a student. Our sweet Millie has been enrolled since she was three months old, and the care, love, and intentional learning she receives are extraordinary. Knowing she is safe, supported, and growing each day brings our family tremendous peace.”

- Dr. Mary-Margaret Satterfield

Children's Services

Since 1957, Signal Centers has been educating young children and serving families through the Children's Services program. Based on an inclusive model, the program offers year-round care for kids with and without disabilities between the ages of six weeks to five years.

Highly qualified and well-trained educators use research-based curriculum to help each child achieve his or her full potential. The program prepares children for school and life, while engaging the whole family.

95%

Of Hamilton County Schools' students met Individualized Education Program goals

100%

Of children went to their expected kindergarten placement

89%

Of children showed growth across all domains on their pre/post assessments



Board Member Greg Eaves and his wife, Carrie, were first introduced to Signal Centers when they were seeking services for their daughter Caroline, who has autism. Caroline had aged out of the school she was attending, and the Eaves were looking for a place that felt like a better fit. After a tour of Signal Centers, they knew they had found the right place. Now 26, Caroline is in a more age-appropriate setting, gets to participate in her favorite activities, and is developing her autonomy.

“Signal Centers has been a blessing to our entire family. Caroline is a happier person since she started attending Adult Day Services, and that happiness has spread throughout our entire family. She is empowered to pick and choose what she wants to participate in. When she wakes up in the morning, the first words out of her mouth are ‘I can’t wait!’”

- Carrie and Greg Eaves

Adult Day Services

Adult Day Services has evolved from five individuals who bowled together in 1978 to a pivotal program that serves more than 60 individuals and their families. The program offers a social model of care with a focus on arts and recreation-based programming.

Individuals with disabilities and older adults are encouraged to be independent in a safe-yet-lively setting, while caregivers are offered opportunities for respite and support for employment.

80%

Of caregivers reported that the program addressed their loved one's individual needs

100%

Of program participants met a personally identified program goal

80%

Of caregivers reported that the program maintained or improved their loved one's emotional and psychological wellbeing

Assistive Technology Services

Assistive Technology Services (ATS) eliminates barriers for clients by helping them navigate a tech-driven world as independently as possible. As one of only two organizations of its type in the state of Tennessee, the program covers a 34-county area and focuses on providing tailored solutions to improve quality of life for

those with a disability. This comes in the form of technology trainings, demonstrations and loans, as well as home and workplace adaptations. Thanks to the Chattanooga Ophthalmological Foundation, ATS also provides a comprehensive suite of services for individuals experiencing vision loss.

500+

Toys adapted and distributed
to area children with disabilities

30

Weeks of low-vision art therapy classes
provided for individuals with low-vision
or blindness

98%

Of participants reported being highly
satisfied with the service received

170

Participants introduced to accessibility
resources at the Signal Centers
Accessibility Awareness Summit

Verdell Hightower has been experiencing vision loss for the better part of four decades. She has trauma-induced glaucoma, from domestic abuse. Verdell attended Assistive Technology Services' EnVision Clinic so she can learn lifestyle skills and accessibility features on her devices to prepare for when she inevitably loses her sight completely. Attending a clinic where all the students and instructors are also blind, has given her the confidence to move forward in this next phase of her life.

“At first, my primary feeling around my vision loss was anger. I was angry at the person who did this to me. Now, I see it as a blessing. I see all the opportunities that are opening up to me... I have the confidence to move forward. I see that this is just the next phase of my life, and I think I'm just going to love it.”

- Verdell Hightower





At 15, Vinelba enrolled in Family Forward as a pregnant high school student determined to graduate, attend college, and provide for her child. The program connected her with baby essentials, coached her on healthy early childhood development, and supported her education. Vinelba became the first in her family to graduate high school, and she started college that fall.

With Family Forward's guidance, her daughter met key developmental milestones and entered kindergarten ready to learn. A paid internship at the Creative Discovery Museum later led to a job as a museum educator, where Vinelba has worked since 2022.

“Since enrolling in Family Forward when I was 15, I have always been able to count on them to provide me with resources and help me with the challenges of being a teen mom. Being a part of this program has meant less stress for me and my daughter.”

- Vinelba Gonzalez

Family Forward

To prepare children and families for lifelong success, Family Forward provides intensive case management in the home for young families and parents who have a child under the age of five. The program, which is made possible through a partnership with the City of Chattanooga, builds community by connecting families to much-needed resources, such as quality prenatal and postnatal care, baby supplies, child care, and more. The fatherhood program encourages

fathers to re-engage with their family through resource connection and education, all within a strong community of other fathers. In 2025, Family Forward was awarded the Fitting Station of the Year, a child passenger safety award from the Tennessee Highway Safety Office. This designation came on the heels of the program installing 212 new carseats and performing 223 safety inspections for families in the community.

33%

Of teen parents pursued trade school or college education during FY25 (compared to 2-6% nationally*)

100%

Of teen dads who were seniors graduated high school on time

94%

Of pregnant women attended all prenatal checkups

**Institute for Women's Policy Research analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education, 2018*

Summer Camps

Camp Signal is a six-week camp that includes themed weeks, and engaging activities like visits from the Chattanooga Fire Department, Creative Discovery Museum, a petting zoo, and more.

Chatter Camp is a one-week camp for nonverbal children and teens. Campers are taught how to use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices. Chatter Camp participants do not have to pay a tuition fee thanks to Friends of Special Children's strong and consistent support for Signal Centers' youth.

EnVision Clinic is a one-week camp for teens and adults who have no or low vision. Clinic attendees are taught device accessibility features, how to navigate public spaces, and much more.

Hart Camp is designed for elementary school students looking to explore their creativity and learn new skills. This three-day camp provides a fun and engaging environment for children to express themselves through various art media.

100%

Of parents reported children gained valuable social skills and interactions

108

Children attended a Signal Centers camp

100%

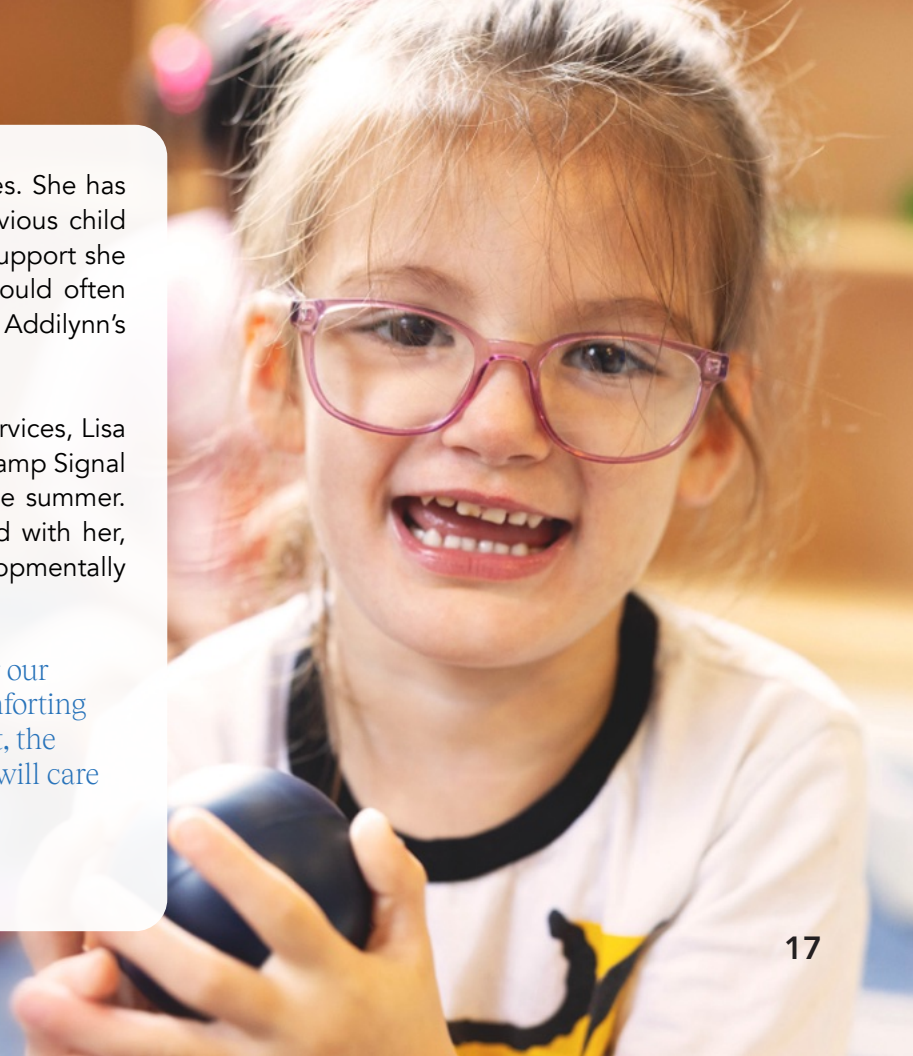
Of parents reported they were able to maintain employment thanks to camp

Addilynn Perdue is a student in Children's Services. She has autism and was placed in the program after previous child care providers weren't equipped to provide the support she needed. Her grandmother and guardian, Lisa, would often have to leave work multiple times a day to assist in Addilynn's care.

After having a great experience with Children's Services, Lisa decided to put Addilynn and her twin brother in Camp Signal so they could be active and social throughout the summer. Children's Services and Camp Signal staff worked with her, and now Addilynn is fully potty trained and developmentally on track.

"Signal Centers has been a really big blessing for our family. My husband and I both work, so it is comforting knowing your children are in a safe environment, the communication will be great, and that the staff will care as much about your child as you do."

- Lisa Perdue



Pediatrician Dr. Aileen Litwin has had three children enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library: seven-year-old Clark, four-year-old Warren, and now 10-month-old Aurelia. Literacy has been a priority in the Litwin household since the children were born, and Dr. Litwin attributes her children's advanced vocabulary and literacy skills to their family routine of reading Dolly Parton books together.

“As a mom and a pediatrician, it has been such a blessing to watch my children build their own libraries. We have something every month that they can look forward to and that we can share together.”

- Dr. Aileen Litwin



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Since launching in 1995, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has become the preeminent early childhood book-gifting program in the world. The program promotes early literacy by mailing a free, age-appropriate book to children each month until their fifth birthday.

Signal Centers has been the local community partner in Hamilton County since 2021, managing fundraising and enrollment for

the program. We also facilitate an advisory committee of community leaders to help increase enrollment across the county, which has led to consistent growth year-over-year for the program. In addition, the Governor's Early Literacy Foundation matches every dollar donated, doubling the impact the program has on young children in our community.

169,945

Books distributed to
Hamilton County children
last year

14,559

Hamilton County children
currently receive free books
each month

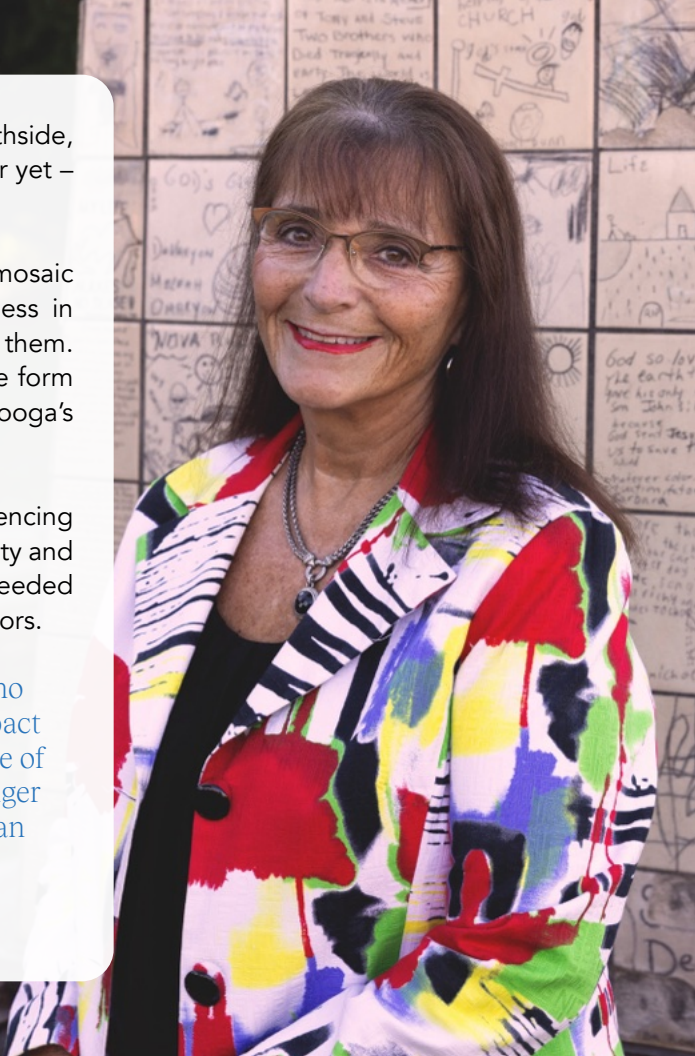
In 2010, “Homes”, a piece of public artwork on Chattanooga’s Southside, was the inspiration for Ellen Heavilon to take on her largest endeavor yet – founding the Hart Gallery.

This collaborative art project, which resulted in an obelisk covered in mosaic tiles, was built piece-by-piece by people experiencing homelessness in Chattanooga. Each tile reflects their vision of what “home” meant to them. The stories embedded in the artwork and the beauty of its collective form sparked her desire to create a new kind of home, one for Chattanooga’s underserved artists.

She envisioned a place where artists living with disabilities, experiencing homelessness, or facing other life challenges could share their creativity and build community. And for the past 15 years, when someone has needed healing, hope, and family, the gallery has been a home with open doors.

“When I had the idea for the Hart Gallery 16 plus years ago, I had no idea if or how it would work. Throughout the years, seeing the impact on so many of our underserved community members has been one of the great blessings in my life. Seeing the artists grow, become stronger in their belief in themselves, and share their talents with others is an inspiration for all who witness their growth.”

- Ellen Heavilon



Hart Gallery

When someone needs healing, hope and family, the Hart Gallery is a home with open doors. It has helped dozens of Chattanooga artists find their voice. The program provides those living with mental and physical disabilities,

experiencing homelessness, and many other underserved populations an opportunity to create and sell their artwork. Art therapists also help artists process their emotions, and in some cases trauma, through creative expression.

92%

Of artists reported improved interpersonal relationships as a result of coming to Hart Gallery

92%

Of artists reported improvements in their mental health and emotional positivity

100%

Of artists reported improved self-esteem



In October 2024, Destiny Phinazee joined Work Ready, determined to build a better future for herself and her community. Over the past year, she completed a six-month internship, took early childhood education classes, and opened her own licensed child care center, Little Blessings.

With continued support from Work Ready, Destiny is on track to earn her Early Childhood Technical Certificate, further strengthening her skills and impact in the field. It is her dream to turn Little Blessings into a franchise with multiple locations.

“Work Ready has helped me a whole lot. They make sure you get your education and will help you complete whatever goals you have. My goal was to open a daycare, and that is what I did.”

- Destiny Phinazee

Work Ready

Work Ready provides individuals eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families a track towards permanent employment in the licensed child care industry. While enrolled in postsecondary coursework, participants in this program are lined up with a paid internship in an early childhood classroom. This addresses two issues: the labor shortage in child care and the employment rate

among lower income citizens. Participating child care centers are incentivized for being a host site while lead teachers are provided bonuses for mentoring interns. This successful workforce development program expanded this year to include other career tracks in customer service, nursing, caregiving, and manufacturing.

86%

Of participants enrolled in training, certificate programs, or higher education after entering Work Ready

44

Interns moved on to permanent employment

83%

Of participants demonstrated increased stability in housing and employment



The Speech & Hearing Center provides speech therapy services for students at Montessori Elementary at Highland Park (MEHP) and Chattanooga Girls Leadership Academy (CGLA). Our speech-language pathologists support students in building the communication skills they need to learn and connect with their peers and teachers.

This includes articulation, fluency, and overall speech intelligibility. Students like A'Mya are working on sound placement and clarity, progressing from practicing individual sounds, to using them in words and sentences, and ultimately carrying those skills into everyday conversations.

“Partnering with Signal’s speech therapy team has strengthened our ability to support every child’s voice. Their expertise helps our students grow in confidence, communication, and connection, and we’re grateful for a partnership that truly puts children first.”

-Dr. Elaine Swafford, CEO of CGLA/MEHP

The Speech & Hearing Center

The Speech & Hearing Center is Chattanooga's only nonprofit program specializing in communication disorders. Since 1953, it has fulfilled its mission of improving quality of life through better communication by providing audiology, speech, occupational and physical

therapy services to individuals of all ages and incomes. For those who can self-pay, a portion of every service or product purchase assists those in our community who would otherwise not be able to afford therapy or hearing devices.

2,373

Children ages five and under were screened for a developmental disability

96%

Of children demonstrated progress toward meeting or exceeding developmental milestones

19,873

Individuals served through services and outreach

2,353

Newborns' hearing was screened at Parkridge East Hospital

Regional and Statewide Programs

Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral	2003
Developmental Therapy	2003
Early Childhood Assessments	2018
Child Care WAGE\$ [®] Tennessee	2019

The success of our local programs has allowed us to scale our impact statewide. Because of the relationship we have developed with key stakeholders, like the Tennessee Department of Human Services and the Tennessee Early Intervention System, these programs are 100% grant funded and do not require any fundraising to maintain.

Child Care Resource & Referral

The Tennessee Child Care Resource and Referral (TN CCR&R) network ensures child care educators across the state have the knowledge, tools, and support they need to provide high-quality care to children and families. Funded through a grant with the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS), TN CCR&R serves all 95 counties by providing training, coaching, and technical assistance rooted in key domains such as child development, early language and literacy, family engagement, and small business practices. Through this statewide support,

TN CCR&R equips child care professionals and families with clear, practical strategies that strengthen early learning and help Tennessee's children thrive.

TN CCR&R also partners with TDHS' pre-licensure team to aid in expanding child care access across the state. Because of these efforts, 204 new child care businesses opened statewide last year, adding 15,519 child care seats for families.

This year, TN CCR&R made significant strides in strengthening early language and literacy through LENA Grow, a research-based educator tool that tracks quality conversational interactions for children.

2,283

Children benefited from increased conversational interactions

261

Child care professionals participated in LENA Grow

7%

Increase in conversational turn taking by all participating children, a key predictor of later literacy success

For more than three decades, Annette Bishop, known to many as “Ms. Nette,” has served children and families through her group child care home. A dedicated early childhood professional with a degree in early childhood education, multiple specialization credentials, and extensive training, she continues to grow in her practice each year. As an Infant Mental Health Endorsement (IMH-E®) credentialed educator, she partners closely with TN CCR&R coaching and literacy supports to strengthen the quality of care in her program. Her experience demonstrates how consistent, relationship-based coaching can transform child care environments and uplift both educators and the children they serve.

“Coaching helps me stay accountable, try new strategies, and turn what I learn in training into real improvements in my classroom. It has been uplifting, motivating, and essential for both me and the families I serve. Coaching brings our ideas to life, and it continues to be a major part of my success.”

- Annette Bishop



Sherry Wilson began working with the Emerson family before Remi was born, supporting them through her Down's syndrome diagnosis and the worries that followed. From the start, her mom, Angel, embraced high expectations for Remi. Together, Sherry and Remi worked weekly on early skills like rolling, sitting, crawling, cruising, and eventually taking steps.

Over time, Remi has overcome early medical concerns and steadily met her developmental milestones. Now, she's walking, using a utensil, drinking from a straw, beginning to use words, naming family members, and following one-step directions with confidence.

“Knowing that I have Sherry... she is my backbone. I wouldn't know what to do and I would have been struggling without her. We love therapy.”

- Angel Emerson



Developmental Therapy

The Developmental Therapy program is a part of the Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS). The developmental therapists serve children from birth to five and their families at home, in the child care setting, or in the community.

They partner with parents and caregivers to offer coaching to help them navigate developmental, physical and/or cognitive delays, promoting a higher quality of life and setting children on the pathway to success.

418

Children and families
served

94%

Of parents reported working
with their therapist gives them
the confidence needed to
work on goals with their child
between sessions

96%

Of children made
progress toward
developmental goals

Early Childhood Assessments

Early Childhood Assessments provides home-based evaluations for children at risk of developmental delays. Using a research-proven assessment tool, evaluators track all five domains of development: physical, cognitive, social-emotional, communicative,

and adaptive. If a delay is detected, Tennessee Early Intervention System will refer the family to a developmental therapist to provide ongoing services. Evaluators then follow up to perform progress evaluations with families.

5,009

Completed eligibility evaluations,
in which 3,026 were identified as
eligible for services

3,638

Completed progress
evaluations

When Poe was six months old, his mom, Audrey, noticed he wasn't babbling "mama" or "dada" like most infants his age. She also noticed his motor skills seemed delayed—he army-crawled instead of getting on his hands and knees. By fifteen months, she decided to reach out for early intervention services, where they met an evaluator who immediately made them feel supported.

As a first-time, single mom, Audrey said the reassurance meant everything to her. Poe has now graduated from speech, feeding, and occupational therapy, and is thriving.

"Our evaluator was one of the kindest people we've ever met. Poe loved her and so do I. Even after his evaluation, she would check in, ask for updates, and celebrate his progress with us. This program truly changed our lives."

- Audrey Childres



Cierria Rogers, Director of Our Glass Learning Center in Memphis, Tennessee believes in creating a stable, enriching foundation for every child. She knows that starts with supporting the educators who guide them each day. She has seen how the WAGE\$ program lifts her staff, enhances their skills, and builds a stronger sense of purpose across her team. Cierria's reflections shine a light on the powerful role WAGE\$ plays in retaining educators and growing confident, knowledgeable professionals in Tennessee's early childhood workforce.

“WAGE\$ helps us feel valued in a profession that is so important to young children and their families. The support allows us to provide more resources in our classrooms and creates stability for educators who might otherwise struggle to stay in the field. It has strengthened our whole team. My assistant on WAGE\$ has grown her knowledge through trainings, built confidence in her career and remained committed to our center for years. The program truly helps us give more to the children in our care and our community.”

- Cierria Rogers



Child Care WAGE\$[®] Tennessee

Child Care WAGE\$[®] Tennessee is transforming early childhood development by providing essential support to early childhood professionals through education-based salary supplements. Recognizing that early educators are the foundation of quality care and learning, the program encourages higher education to improve both teaching quality

and retention rates in the field. By providing this financial incentive, WAGE\$ aims to reduce turnover, strengthen the workforce, and equip educators with the skills necessary to create nurturing, effective learning environments for Tennessee's youngest citizens.

\$6,205,474

In supplements distributed

\$26,268,058

In supplements distributed since
program inception

57,738

Children provided a stable learning
environment from a WAGE\$ recipient

95%

Of educators reported WAGE\$
encourages them or their staff to stay
employed at their child care center



“Signal Centers is not just a place. It is a mission and culture that resides in the hearts of its dedicated staff, leaders, and board members. It is a mission which brings invaluable assistance and support to many of our most vulnerable fellow citizens in Chattanooga, Hamilton County, and throughout Tennessee.”

- Bill Lloyd, Board President

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Major Funders & Partners

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ArtsBuild
Bachman Foundation
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Benwood Foundation
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BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee
CARTA
Cempa Community Care
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Chattanooga Civitan Children's Foundation
Chattanooga Coca Cola
Chattanooga Ophthalmological Foundation
Chattanooga Times Free Press
CHI Memorial Foundation
City of Chattanooga
Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga
Elder's Ace Hardware
Electric Power Board
Erlanger Health System
First Horizon
Food City
Foundry Pattern Service
Frank P. Pierce Foundation
Friends of Special Children

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Governor's Early Literacy Foundation
Hamico
Hamilton County Government
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Impact Facility Solutions, LLC
Jewell Foundation
JHM Certified Public Accountants
Journey Health Foundation
Knights of Columbus Council 6099
Komatsu America Corp
Lakeshore Learning
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Orange Grove Center
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Patten & Patten
Pax Wealth Group
Pinnacle Financial Partners
R&D Properties
Robert Finley Stone Foundation

Sanofi
Schillhahn-Huskey Foundation
Silverdale Baptist Academy
Tallented Interiors
Tennessee Early Intervention System
Tennessee Arts Commission
Tennessee Department of Human Services
Tennessee Highway Safety Office
Tennessee Technology Access Program
The Dollywood Foundation
The Kennedy Foundation
Tennessee Valley Federal Credit Union
United Way of Greater Chattanooga
Unum
UTC Department of Engineering
Waverly Advisors, LLC
Weldon F. Osborne Foundation
Wolftever Development
Women of Distinction of Greater Chattanooga

Operating Budget: \$52,478,154

Local Programs **\$6,362,374**

Adult Day Services
\$374,100

Assistive Technology Services
\$923,100

Children's Services
\$2,133,174

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library
\$250,000

Family Forward
\$932,000

Hart Gallery
\$223,000

The Speech & Hearing Center
\$1,517,000

Work Ready
\$1,300,000

Regional and Statewide Programs **\$46,115,780**

Child Care WAGES® Tennessee
\$10,000,000

Early Childhood Assessments
\$1,498,640

Developmental Therapy
\$858,945

Child Care Resource & Referral Network
\$32,458,195

Administrative Costs

One way we have cultivated relationships with our funders is by creating proposals with limited administrative costs. It is vital we are good stewards of the trust and financial investment our funders have bestowed upon us, and for Signal Centers that means reserving as much program money as possible for direct services for the families we serve.



Friends of Special Children

Our work would not be possible without the Friends of Special Children. While we continue serving families, they've come alongside us to help with fundraising, campus improvements, volunteering, hosting camps, and more. Their spirit of philanthropy has truly transformed our campus and services.



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