

STEP, Inc. Staff and Board Members Attend Regional Conference

Greeneville – Several staff and board members of STEP, Inc. (Support and Training for Exceptional Parents), an organization serving families who have children and youth with disabilities in Tennessee, attended the “Shared Outcomes Technical Assistance Center Conference” in Charleston, South Carolina on June 23-25, 2015. This annual conference, required by the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs for federally funded Parent Centers, provides an opportunity for Parent Center staff to increase their knowledge base and skill set to meet the training and information needs of families and youth. Key content areas included Engaging Students in Their Success, Building Rapport with Youth, Evidence Based Practices for Support Young Children with Special Needs, Cultural Proficiency and 21st Century Family: Address Poverty, Disability and Ethnicity, Using Data to Inform Instruction, Infographics for Low Literacy & English Language Learners, and Equity and Education.

Derek Flake, STEP West TN Coordinator (Memphis), Karen Jones, Parent and STEP Board Member (Memphis), and Marcaren Christian, Self-Advocate and STEP’s first Ex Officio Youth Board Member (Memphis) presented a session entitled “Journey of Self Determination” during the conference. They shared the personal story of their journey to empowerment, self-advocacy, and becoming effective partners with school professionals. Parent educators and advocates gained encouragement as they heard how this family from Memphis, TN refused to accept an education that included isolation and discriminatory practices toward a student with multiple special needs. Using skills learned through STEP this family worked toward a brighter outcome that includes inclusive education and the support needed to enable Marcaren to demonstrate her outstanding abilities. Mr. Flake, Ms. Jones, and Ms. Christian also participated in the “Equity and Education” panel discussion, showcasing the impact individuals can have on systemic change. Joey Ellis, Middle TN Coordinator and Lauren Bethune, from Charlotte, NC presented on Web Based Tools for Transition from their Self-Advocacy Webinar series, which included innovated ways to increase youth’s involvement in the transition planning process.

Terry Long, of the IDEA Data Center and STEP Board Member (Murfreesboro) also presented a session during the conference entitled “Using Data to Inform Parent Center’s Work.” This session reviewed the types of state data collected regarding children and youth with disabilities that are publicly available; opportunities for Parent Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers to provide stakeholder input on current state initiatives; and ways to use state IDEA data in their work on strategic planning, grant writing and program evaluation. One data source of particular interest to families of children with disabilities is the newly released State determinations from the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. These can be viewed at the following links:

- TN Part B rated as "Needs Assistance" --
<https://osep.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/8182>
- TN Part C rated as "Needs Assistance" --
<https://osep.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/8304>

Eighty-nine participants from 15 states attended the 3-day Region 2 Technical Assistance Center conference hosted by the Region 2 Parent Technical Assistance Centers (RPTAC). The Region 2 RPTAC serves Tennessee as well as DC, DE, KY, MD, NC, SC, VA, and WV, providing ongoing assistance to Parent Centers to enhance their work.

While in Charleston, STEP staff paid their respects at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, also known as Mother Emanuel AME Church.

About STEP, Inc.:

STEP, Inc. (Support & Training for Exceptional Parents) houses one of 109 Parent Centers across the U.S. funded by the U.S. Department of Education. STEP is a statewide nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that relies on individual, corporate, and foundation contributions and support. Parent Center services are FREE and available to any parent or family member of a child or youth with a disability, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), ages birth through age 26.

For over 25 years STEP has been serving Tennessee families who have children with disabilities, youth with disabilities and working collaboratively with schools and other organizations that provide services and supports to families and youth. STEP, Inc. is headquartered in Greeneville, with offices in East (Greeneville), Middle (Nashville) and West (Memphis) Tennessee.

For more information about services provided by STEP please visit our website at www.tnstep.org or contact us at 423-639-0125 or toll free in TN at 800-280-7837 or via email at information@tnstep.org. Services are also available in Spanish at 800-975-2919 (Española). To make a tax deductible donation visit www.tnstep.org/donate. To volunteer your services visit www.tnstep.org/involved.