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Friends of Tennessee's
BABIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

2nd Quarter 2025



FOTB DAY AT ZOO KNOXVILLE

Sunshine, smiles, and a whole lot of furry fun—this year's Family Day at Zoo Knoxville was one to remember! More than 1,700 guests came together to explore the wonders of wildlife and build meaningful connections with other families. The day was packed with joy and celebration and lots of fun animal encounters! One of the biggest highlights? A special appearance from the Easter Bunny—complete with photo ops and special treats!

A heartfelt thank you goes out to Variety Charities and the Greater Knoxville Sertoma Club for sponsoring this incredible event. And an extra special thank you to Zoo Knoxville for opening their gates and hearts to our families, ensuring every guest felt welcome, included, and celebrated.

It was a day full of laughter, connection, and unforgettable memories—made possible by the kindness of our partners and the spirit of our community.

Click [here](#) to see a highlight video of this wonderful day!

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2025 Wellness Training

Caring for the Caregivers: FOTB Hosts Wellness Training for Special Needs Providers Supported by a Grant from Trinity Health Foundation

Friends of Tennessee's Babies was honored to receive a generous grant from the Trinity Health Foundation, allowing us to invest in those who dedicate their lives to supporting our families. With this funding, we hosted a daylong seminar of training, reflection, and encouragement for professional special needs providers—including early interventionists and service coordinators. Led by experts from The Oaks Therapeutic Community, the event focused on strategies for maintaining emotional resilience, preventing burnout, and fostering long-term well-being in high-demand caregiving roles.



FOTB BENEFITS FROM PILOT CORPORATION VOLUNTEER DAY!

Thank you to Pilot Company for Including us in the 2025 Spring Volunteer Day! Their amazing volunteers cleaned out the gutters and spruced up our outside areas including planting flowers and shrubs and spreading 75 bags of mulch! Thank you Jordan, Kathleen, James and Clarence for being a friend! We are so very grateful!



We've Been Playing on the Railroad!

FOTB hosts many beautiful events throughout the year—but our annual day at Chandler Farms holds a special kind of magic. Set against the backdrop of open fields and playful tracks, families of children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing delighted in a one-of-a-kind experience—playing on the railroad, enjoying the company of friends old and new, and soaking in the peaceful charm of the farm. Children laughed, explored, and created memories in a setting designed to make them feel free and celebrated. A heartfelt thank you to the Chandler family, whose kindness and hospitality make this day possible each year. Their generous spirit and welcoming hearts ensure that every guest feels truly special. Click [here](#) to see more fun photos from our special day!



Take Me Out to the Ballgame! FOTB Day at Smokies Stadium

Friends of Tennessee's Babies hit it out of the park this season with a joyful day at the new Covenant Ballpark, home of the Tennessee Smokies. Over 400 FOTB friends came out to enjoy America's favorite pastime under blue skies and sunshine (except for a quick shower)—a perfect recipe for laughter, connection, and unforgettable memories. From the smell of popcorn to the crack of the bat, families soaked in every moment of the game in a welcoming and inclusive setting. The day was made possible through the generous support of Raja Jubran and the Concord Farragut Sertoma Club. One of the day's most touching moments came when one of our special friends stepped onto the field to throw out the first pitch. With cheers echoing from the stands and pride beaming from every face, this was a strong reminder that our community is simply beautiful!

Click [here](#) to see a quick video highlighting this special day!



Mark your calendars and get your tickets today for Jazz Baby 2025! Click [here](#) to make your reservation for a wonderful evening of smooth jazz and supporting babies!



ZONA MAYO YOUNG AMBASSADOR OF THE YEAR

Each year at Jazz Baby, Friends of Tennessee's Babies with Special Needs shines a spotlight on one remarkable young person who truly sees and serves our community. This individual is named FOTB's Zona Mayo Young Ambassador of the Year—a title reserved for someone who not only exemplifies our mission, but lives it out in school, church, and everyday life.

The Young Ambassador of the Year is:

- A student between the ages of 14–18
 - A volunteer and advocate for children with special needs
 - A participant in FOTB events, always willing to lend a helping hand
 - A passionate supporter of early intervention and family care—working to enhance the potential of children with disabilities through empathy, inclusion, and action.
- This award is our way of recognizing tomorrow's leaders today—those who are building a brighter world through small acts of kindness and big hearts of service. Do you know someone who would be an excellent candidate for the 2025 Young Ambassador of the Year Award? Click [here](#) to fill out a nomination form and help us honor the next generation of changemakers!



2025 FAMILY ENCOURAGEMENT CONFERENCE

*A Day of Connection
and Hope for our
Special Families!*



This year's Family Encouragement Conference was a beautiful reflection of what makes Friends of Tennessee's Babies so special—compassion, community, and unwavering support for families of children with disabilities. Held in partnership with Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church and Joni & Friends, the day brought together families, professionals, and organizations for a vibrant day of encouragement! Attendees explored an incredible vendor fair showcasing more than two dozen local resources, each committed to serving the needs of our special families. There were 12 diverse breakout sessions led by trusted local professionals, offering insights on everything from therapy tools and behavioral strategies to financial planning and caregiver wellness.

Our Rest and Relaxation Area and Coffee & Conversation Room gave our caregivers a place to simply sit and reflect or connect with other families for awhile. The "Stronger Together Luncheon" gave attendees a chance to meet other caregivers and have meaningful conversation over a yummy lunch from Jason's Deli. It was a joy-filled day of learning, listening, and connecting—a celebration of the village it takes to love and care well for our special babies. Thank you to the family of Karen Hollingsworth for starting this incredible annual event and thank you to our generous donors including Formall and Random Acts of Flowers who helped make all of this possible.



Pearls of Wisdom

This year marks a monumental milestone —30 years of Friends of Tennessee's Babies walking alongside families of children with disabilities. To commemorate this legacy, Advisory Council Member Mary Donnet Johnson reflected on the traditional symbol of a 30th anniversary: the pearl.



Inspired by this symbolism, Marketing Coordinator Amanda Rader began weaving pearls into the year's events. Through her research, she discovered a poignant parallel—pearls are formed through adversity, their beauty shaped by persistent irritation within the oyster. Much like the journey of families raising children with special needs, the pearl represents strength, transformation, and grace under pressure. Moved by this powerful metaphor, Amanda titled her keynote address for the 2025 Family Encouragement Conference "Pearls of Wisdom." In her speech, she shared heartfelt reflections on growth, resilience, and the insight gained through challenges. It was a touching tribute to the everyday heroism of caregivers and the precious lives they nurture. Click [here](#) to hear her moving presentation at our event.

Pearls of Wisdom Shared by Family Encouragement Conference Attendees

"Just love them! And give yourself the grace to love yourself!"

FIGHT for joy!

It's the grit that makes the pearl. Carry on!

Dare to be different; the world is full of ordinary.

You are stronger than you think.

Your child is "fearfully and wonderfully made!"

KEEP GOING

Give yourself grace! You're doing the best you can with what you know.



To see highlight reels from our events and keep up with all of our happenings, scan the QR code and like and follow us on Facebook and Instagram. Please tell your friends too!



Finding Light Through Jordan

At 18 weeks pregnant, we learned our son Jordan would be born with hydrocephalus. Later, he was diagnosed with L1 Syndrome—a rare genetic condition that affects his development in many ways. At just one day old, Jordan had surgery to place a VP shunt to drain excess fluid from his brain. He's since undergone another shunt surgery, and uses many specialized tools: a wheelchair, gait trainer, bath chair, eye gaze device, and orthopedic braces.



But Jordan's story isn't defined by limitations—it's defined by JOY.

He beams with happiness while walking short distances in his gait trainer and requesting bubbles or snacks with his eye gaze. He gives high fives, shares endless kisses, and his laughter is contagious. Even though daily life includes real challenges, our journey as Jordan's parents has transformed us. We've become stronger, more compassionate, and we find joy in the moments that matter. Jordan's happiness is expressed through simple yet powerful gestures—a smile, a single spoken word ("Mama"), a well-timed kiss. Though milestones may look different, they are no less meaningful. And through it all, Friends of Tennessee's Babies has walked beside us.

Our Lifeline: FOTB's Support

Thanks to an early diagnosis, Jordan began therapy at just three weeks old. Our TEIS coordinator told us about FOTB—and it quickly became a vital support system. From compression clothing and feeding aids to a pool for at-home aquatic therapy, FOTB helped fill gaps insurance couldn't cover. And with one parent home full time due to Jordan's needs, every bit of financial support made a meaningful difference.

But the greatest gift from FOTB? Connection.

Attending events like Smokies games and Butterfly Run/Celebration Walks gave us community and confidence. We met families like ours. We felt seen. And Jordan thrived in environments that were both fun and inclusive. One unforgettable moment came during the Butterfly Run when we met Pete Cappell of Power of Play. Pete introduced Jordan to a "Wild Thing"—an adapted ride-on toy—and encouraged us to find one for Jordan. Thanks to a series of serendipitous connections and the kindness of strangers, we not only found two Wild Things but were gifted them for free. Pete is now adapting Jordan's orange one—his favorite color—so he can cruise in style soon!

FOTB supports families in many valuable ways. Supporting in financial ways, connecting with resources, and creating community for families to meet. FOTB is there at the very beginning of a diagnosis, which is usually the darkest and hardest time of the special needs journey for parents and families. Knowing there is an organization who cares for our kids, gives families like ours hope, and provides opportunities for babies and kids with disabilities to enjoy life has made a huge impact for our family personally.