

# THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND NEWSLETTER

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*Friends of Tennessee's*  
**BABIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**  
1st Quarter 2026



## NICU BABY SHOWERS ARE BACK!

FOT Babies is delighted to once again be hosting our NICU baby showers! We have partnered with Dolly Parton Children's Hospital to host our quarterly baby shower for families currently navigating the NICU journey. This project was a beloved tradition long before COVID, and we are so grateful to finally bring it back.

Why do we do it? Because NICU parents deserve to feel supported, informed, and seen. These showers offer encouragement, practical resources, and a moment of joy during an incredibly stressful time reminding families that they are not alone and that they are an essential part of their baby's care team.

On February 17th, we held our first post-COVID shower, welcoming 18 parents and caregivers. Representatives from TEIS, WIC, and the Tellico Village Kiwanis Foundation joined us, and families went home with formula, handmade gifts, goodie bags, hospital items, and FOT Babies care packages. Beginning next quarter, Kimberly-Clark will generously provide a case of diapers for each family. A heartfelt thank you to Allison Henderson for taking the lead on this important project, and to our volunteers, peer mentors, and NICU staff for making this event such a meaningful success.

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Our 3rd Annual Butterfly Run brought together an incredible community of families, friends, and supporters...even on a cold spring morning. The weather may have been brisk, but the energy was bright, and everyone still managed to have a wonderful time coming together for a cause that means so much to our families.

This year, we welcomed 277 participants joining us on race day with even more “sleeping but supporting” from home. The 3K saw over 130 runners with the 1-mile walk welcoming close to the same. Behind the scenes, 52 dedicated volunteers kept everything running smoothly, and our race partners at Total Race Solutions ensured a seamless and spirited event from start to finish.

We are deeply grateful to our generous sponsors including Axle Logistics, Harper Auto Square, Pinnacle, Summit Medical, Sherri and John Murphy, Rusty Wallace Honda, and CBBC Bank. Their support makes this fundraiser possible each year. We also extend heartfelt thanks to our in-kind sponsors, including Chick-fil-A (Alcoa and Chapman Hwy), Texas Roadhouse, Dunkin Donuts, Home Depot, Sam’s Club East, and April Buckner whose contributions made our day extra special. Our Butterfly Cove area was full of fun as families enjoyed connecting with exhibitors from Prisma Pediatric Rehabilitation, ABA Centers, and Texas Roadhouse, who brought valuable resources and friendly faces to the event.

A special congratulations goes to our Team Winner, UTHSC Audiology and Speech Pathology, who showed up with an impressive 38 participants. This year’s T-shirts and medals were proudly created by Pokey’s Sports & Engraving, adding a fun and memorable touch for everyone who crossed the finish line.

This event simply wouldn’t be possible without the collective heart of our sponsors, volunteers, exhibitors, FOTB Board and Staff, and our partners at Total Race Solutions. Thank you for helping us turn a cold morning into a warm, joyful success for the babies and families we serve.



Would you like to be a “friend” to Tennessee’s Babies with Special Needs? It’s EASY! Just visit our website [www.helpingbabies.org](http://www.helpingbabies.org) and click on the volunteer/give tab at the top of the page. You can make a big difference in the life of Tennessee’s babies!



# Annual Board Retreat

Working together toward an exciting new year!



On January 10th, our Board of Directors gathered at the beautiful home of Frank and Lisha Venable for our annual Board Planning Retreat. We were delighted to welcome members of our Advisory Council, who joined us for lunch and contributed their insight and creativity during breakout discussions.

Throughout the afternoon, board and council members worked together to spark new ideas, strengthen existing initiatives, and explore fresh ways to grow our programs so we can better serve the families who rely on us. We are so fortunate to have such dedicated leaders guiding this organization. A heartfelt thank you to our Board, our Advisory Council, and our gracious hosts, Frank and Lisha Venable, for opening their home to us.



# Lots of Bright New Faces at FOTB in the Office and on the Board!

Friends of Tennessee's Babies with Special Needs is delighted to welcome everyone to introduce several wonderful additions to our team: Jennifer Garland will be serving as our new Finance Manager; Emma Pace is joining our Events team; and Elizabeth Martin will be handling our marketing. Each has already jumped in with heart and talent, and we are so grateful to have such dedicated folks supporting our mission.



## Meet Sherri Murphy...

Sherri Murphy is a proud Knoxville native that celebrates all things "southern". Her greatest joy is her husband John and daughter Morgan. She is a retired Knoxville Real Estate agent who specialized in new house construction sales. Hobbies include golfing and bowling. Sherri enjoys leadership and encouraging others. Her goal while serving on the FOTB Board is to bring creative ways to uplift and help the families we serve. Former philanthropic commitments were serving on the Board for Volunteer Ministry Center, being a friend to the Knoxville Opera, and fundraising for Sacred Heart School.



## Meet David Holmes...

David Holmes knows firsthand what it means to navigate life with a child with special needs. His daughter, Winn, was diagnosed with Prader-Willi Syndrome, and that experience transformed him. A dad of three beautiful daughters, he is determined to make the road easier for families walking a similar path. A Knoxville native, David brings both personal passion and professional discipline to the FOTB board. He looks forward to lending his energy and perspective to an organization whose mission hits close to home ensuring that every family, regardless of circumstance, has access to the care, equipment, and support their child needs to thrive.

# Exciting Grant News...

## Sevierville 100 Women Who Care Award



Friends of Tennessee's Babies with Special Needs is thrilled to share some exciting news! Our organization was recently nominated and selected to present alongside two other nonprofits for a competitive \$10,000 grant. Teresa McMahan represented FOT Babies at the meeting in Sevierville, where she spoke from the heart about our mission, our families, and the impact of our programs. Her passion and authenticity shone through, and as a result, our organization was chosen to receive the grant. We are incredibly proud of Teresa and grateful for her dedication to the babies and families we serve. A heartfelt thank-you goes to Sevierville 100 Women Who Care for their generosity, belief in our work, and commitment to strengthening our community. This support helps us continue providing essential resources and compassionate care to Tennessee's babies with special needs

# Celebrating Mothers and Helping Babies...Make a donation for Mother's Day and get a beautiful card to share!

Mother's Day is almost here, and Friends of Tennessee's Babies with Special Needs invites you to celebrate the incredible moms who care for some of East Tennessee's tiniest miracles. Our annual Mother's Day Card Campaign is underway, offering a meaningful way to honor the people who have nurtured, encouraged, and shaped your life...all while helping us serve our local families. When you visit our website and make a tax-deductible donation, you'll receive one of our beautiful greeting cards, designed by a talented local artist with Down syndrome, for every \$10 you give. These cards are perfect for anyone who makes life brighter: mothers, teachers, coaches, friends, relatives, or anyone you hold dear. Your gift not only celebrates someone special but also helps us continue supporting families raising children with special needs across our region.

## ALOHA! The 2026 Family Encouragement Conference is Coming Soon!

**Family Encouragement Conference 2026**

Acceptance  
Love  
Ohana  
Hope  
Advocacy

**Join Us:**  
an "ALOHA" themed day  
featuring:

- Keynote Speaker: Mary Donnet Johnson
- Breakout Sessions
- Light Breakfast, Lunch, Snacks Provided
- Rest & Renewal Rooms
- Exhibitors
- Door Prizes!

**JUNE 27<sup>TH</sup> | 8:15<sup>AM</sup> - 2:30<sup>PM</sup>**  
Hosted at Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church

   

We are so excited to invite you to the 2026 Family Encouragement Conference, in collaboration with Joni and Friends and hosted by Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church! Mark your calendars for June 27th from 8:15 AM–2:30PM for a day dedicated to supporting adults who care for someone with special needs. This tropical themed event will feature incredible guest speakers, engaging breakout sessions, a “Rest and Renewal Room,” provided lunch, and so much more!

Our guest speakers will address a variety of topics designed to encourage, equip, and support those navigating the journey of caregiving. We hope you'll join us for this meaningful and refreshing day! Keep a look out as registration will open soon!