



Advocates for Families in Need

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November 2014

Dear Friends of TJC,

This has been quite a year. I was stumped about how to convey the challenges and triumphs of this year in only a couple of pages. Then, I stepped on a Lego – not uncommon in a home with three boys. Like Legos, the secret of TJC’s success is its capacity to use simple, proven building blocks in new, creative ways. In 2014, we had to do just that. Faced with dramatic changes to the health care landscape, more Tennesseans needed our help than ever before.

TJC’s health law expertise and history of compassionate advocacy put us in the right place, at the right time, to make a critical difference for families from Memphis to Mountain City. As a small public interest law firm, we’re constantly trying to find new ways to optimize our limited resources. We respond to changes and stretch our capacity to meet as many growing needs as possible using TJC’s basic building blocks – the same enduring principles that have sustained us since 1995:

- a faith, continually reaffirmed, in the generosity and creativity of the hundreds of colleagues, volunteers, and supporters who partner in TJC’s work;
- a passionate belief in the worth of every person;
- a determination that the needs of vulnerable Tennesseans drive our work;
- openness to new partnerships and ways to extend our reach beyond TJC’s limited resources; and
- gratitude for the privilege of serving clients of extraordinary courage and generosity of spirit.

TJC’s passionate commitment to these time-tested principles continues to change lives. Take Beverly, a nurse who devoted 35 years to selflessly caring for her neighbors on the Cumberland Plateau. Years ago she contracted hepatitis during a blood transfusion. Eventually the disease progressed, and a liver transplant was her only hope. When the hospital realized that her insurance did not cover transplants, she was taken off the transplant list and sent home under hospice care with only two weeks to live. Beverly’s daughters contacted TJC.

As she has done for countless others, Jane Beasley, TJC’s senior paralegal and a force of nature, found a way to get Beverly coverage. TJC, in collaboration with other non-profits, alerted an empathetic journalist to Beverly’s story, and got a compassionate state official to expedite a TennCare application. We convinced another hospital to put Beverly back on the waiting list and perform the surgery even before TennCare had come through. While the family waited for a donated organ, Beverly’s daughter called to say, “Now mom at least knows that she matters, and that someone cares whether she lives.” In the midst of a faceless, bureaucratic health care system, TJC helped Beverly remember that she matters to her community. Beverly received a successful transplant and has made a remarkable recovery.

Beverly’s experience revealed a huge unmet need to train health care workers and volunteers on eligibility rules so that the uninsured can gain coverage rather than be denied care. Since January, TJC has responded with 93 trainings and webinars. We trained hundreds of healthcare social workers and volunteers statewide and, through them, enabled thousands of families to gain health coverage.

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One of those trainees was attorney Rob Watkins, a volunteer who is helping to create software that will enable nearly anyone who receives an hour of instruction to calculate eligibility, just as TurboTax enables people to manage the complexity of the tax code. Rob spent hundreds of hours with Jane, the eligibility wizard who helped save Beverly's life, developing an algorithm. A foundation provided seed money, and Rob joined our staff to work full time on the project. We are now looking for partners to convert the algorithm, known fittingly as *AskJane*, into user-friendly software. The first tool of its kind, *AskJane* can provide an essential check on official eligibility decisions at a time when the state system is flawed. In my kids' Lego world, *AskJane* is Lego's Ultimate Collector Series – zillions of small pieces, hundreds of hours of problem solving, and a masterpiece at the end!

Another amazing TJC volunteer-turned-staff member is Margaret Ecker, a nurse practitioner making innovative use of TJC's basic building blocks to tackle Tennessee's Coverage Gap. As many as 330,000 Tennesseans fall into this Gap, the result of our state's decision to bar them from federally funded TennCare coverage authorized by the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The state's refusal of funding leaves many hospitals with revenue shortfalls that have already closed two hospitals and threaten over thirty more. A community's loss of its hospital is devastating to both its health and its economy, causing the entire healthcare infrastructure to flounder. Margaret has recruited and trained "Ambassadors" from rural communities to educate their neighbors about the urgent need to close the Gap. TJC is betting that Margaret and the Ambassadors will help close that Gap in 2015.

Tennessee's implementation of the ACA is the most troubled of any state, generating tragic consequences for Tennesseans that now need TJC's vital help. Tens of thousands of TennCare applications have been delayed for many months or lost altogether. Former TJC executive director Gordon Bonnyman, who is savoring his new TJC role as a full time attorney, enlisted friends at the Southern Poverty Law Center and the National Health Law Program to help tackle the problem. Negotiations led the state to enroll 18,000 newborns whose coverage – and access to vitally needed care – had been illegally delayed for months. When the state refused other remedial steps, we filed the country's first lawsuit challenging a state's failure to comply with the ACA. We won an emergency order in September. People in every county, from newborns in NICUs to frail seniors in nursing homes, are already benefiting.

For 19 years, TJC has fought to ensure that each person in Tennessee gets the care they deserve. This year presented us with seemingly insurmountable challenges, and we have been pushed to innovate. Using the incredible foundation of friends and supporters across the state, we are able to build new and breathtaking structures with our core blocks. Your help has made it possible for us to serve clients like Beverly. The message her family left for Jane after Mother's Day is also a message to you: "We just wanted to thank you for Mother's Day. Without you, we wouldn't have been able to celebrate it with our mother." On behalf of Beverly and the thousands of other lives you have helped TJC touch this year, thank you so much for making TJC's success possible.

Sincerely yours,



Michele Johnson
Executive Director
[Tennessee Justice Center](#)