



# Independence Program

The West End Home Foundation supports TJC's Independence Team, which helps older adults navigate complex programs to get long-term care and health services they need to stay healthy and independent in the community. The Foundation funds the position of CHOICES Client Advocate. Katie Ann Twiggs, pictured, is currently serving in this role



## TENNCARE CHOICES

**CHOICES** is Tennessee's Medicaid (TennCare) long-term care program for older adults and people with disabilities. This program allows individuals to age-in-place and can improve their quality of life. It is a vital support for all but the wealthiest Tennesseans since the cost of long-term care is well over most older adults' incomes. However, the complex eligibility standards and policies can make the program very difficult to navigate, and Tennessee has some of the most restrictive policies in the country. TJC's Independence program provides legal advocacy for older adults encountering enrollment barriers for TennCare CHOICES and advocacy to improve the system for others.

**So far in 2018, Independence has helped over 140 Tennesseans seeking assistance with access to long-term supports and services through the CHOICES program, helping them secure over \$1.5 million worth of health care and long-term care benefits.** In addition, Independence trains and supports others who intersect with this population on the complex CHOICES rules. **TJC has trained over 400 caregivers and stakeholders this year on navigating the CHOICES program.**

TJC also leverages its knowledge of the policies and client stories to address systemic issues that affect older adults across the state. For instance, pressure from TJC and other agencies sparked an investigation by the Tennessee Comptroller's Office to investigate missed shifts, inadequate care, and other homecare provider agency issues. TJC is also working to make the "safety determination" process more transparent and accessible. A safety determination is an important policy that TJC and its partners helped win. It allows older adults who can't meet the restrictive criteria, but who are unsafe in the community without help, the opportunity to enroll in CHOICES.

With assistance from the West End Home Foundation, the Independence Team helps many vulnerable Tennesseans who find themselves in need of long-term care and don't know where else to go.

# Becky and Sherry's Story

58-year-old Becky Lee Rains got into a car wreck with her husband on November 28, 2017. That wreck tragically left Ms. Rains quadriplegic and took her husband's life. Immediately, Ms. Rains' sister, Sherry Garland, came down from her home in Kentucky to help her sister. On top of the devastating physical and emotional impact of the wreck, Ms. Rains found herself in great need of medical care with no health insurance. She and her husband had previously received health insurance coverage through the health insurance Marketplace. After the accident, they could no longer afford it.

Sherry tried to help her sister apply for TennCare's CHOICES program. They encountered many issues with the application process. The family's frustration and stress were exacerbated by mounting bills and pressure to discharge her from the hospital if they did not find a way to get Becky health insurance.

Completely overwhelmed and concerned for her sister's wellbeing, Ms. Garland sought assistance through Tennessee Justice Center. TJC was able to help the family fight through the red tape. With TJC's help, Ms. Rains was able to get approved for TennCare. Instead of focusing on the stress of looming medical debt and the uncertainty of access to medical care, Ms. Rains and Ms. Garland can now focus on regaining strength and building a new life. She says that working with TJC and Katie Ann Twiggs made such a difference in her life.

The Tennessee Justice Center's Independence Team, with support from The West End Home Foundation, strengthens the safety net that is intended to support our most vulnerable neighbors, helping them age with dignity and care.

