

# Independence

Easterseals Wisconsin Newsletter  
Winter/Spring 2025

## Many Hands Make Light Work

For many years, TR McKenzie has been a dedicated supporter of Easterseals Wisconsin's programs and services. Their latest contributions, providing hands-on work and resources to improve Easterseals Wisconsin's camp facilities, once again prove their commitment to ensuring a safe, accessible, and inclusive environment for campers and staff.



*TR McKenzie took the day off and brought their crew to camp for a day of team building.*

In spring of 2024, a team of TR McKenzie staff members arrived at camp with carts full of materials and supplies needed to take on essential projects. The team worked to replace water heaters and make necessary updates to the facilities just in time for the arrival of summer campers.

In the fall, TR McKenzie once again stepped up in a big way. At the request of the Director of Camp and Respite Services, Amanda Verhagen, they took on the task of building a new sensory room. To make this happen, TR McKenzie scheduled a full office shutdown for a day, dedicating their entire team to the project.



"We unboxed everything, assembled it all, and installed all the sensory equipment and decor," said Kristen Eastman of TR McKenzie. "It really brightened the space and made it more user-friendly."



They didn't stop there, taking on more projects. They renovated one of the camp's side-by-side housing units, which included ripping out old carpet, repairing cabinets, and repainting the entire space. Additional improvements were made to organization areas, supply closets, and laundry facilities.

"This was a great team-building exercise for us," Eastman shared. "We like to donate and give our time back, and I just thought this would be the perfect opportunity."



Easterseals Wisconsin is incredibly grateful for TR McKenzie's generosity and dedication. Their long-standing partnership has contributed greatly to enhancing camp facilities, and their continued support ensures that campers have a safe, inclusive, and accessible experience. *Thank you, TR McKenzie, and to all who participated!*

## Jeff Kratochwill Receives National AgrAbility Award

Jeff Kratochwill, ATP, Director of FARM & Vocational Services, was a recipient of the Breaking New Ground achievement award from the National AgrAbility training workshop in Atlanta. The Breaking New Ground Achievement Award is given to individuals who have shown outstanding commitment to serving farmers with disabilities.



Easterseals Wisconsin's Rural Rehabilitation Specialists are passionate about agriculture and creating more chances for independence on the farm for farmers with disabilities. As the award states, "Cultivating Independence for Persons with Disabilities in Agriculture" is exactly what the FARM Program at Easterseals Wisconsin is all about.

If you know a farmer operating their farm with a disability who could use a little help, please reach out to Jeff at: 608.279.9436.

## Carlee Fosco Receives ACA Newcomer Award

Carlee Fosco, Director of Camp Wawbeek, has been presented with the American Camp Association (ACA) Wisconsin Newcomer Award. This honor celebrates Fosco's outstanding achievements and contributions to the camp community in Wisconsin.



Fosco, who has been an active ACA member for less than three years, has quickly established herself as a dedicated leader and advocate for the camp community. Her commitment to the mission of the ACA has been demonstrated through her participation in a wide range of activities, including attending annual meetings, workshops, and breakfasts. These events foster collaboration and connection among camp professionals.

The ACA Wisconsin Newcomer Award is one of several annual awards given to individuals who make a significant impact in the camp field. Fosco's recognition highlights the bright future of camp leadership in the state, and serves as a testament to her hard work and commitment to making camp accessible and inclusive for all.

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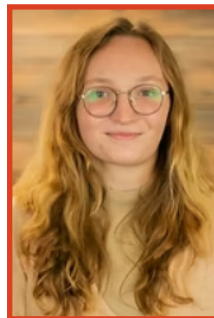
Easterseals Wisconsin  
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# Easterseals Wisconsin News

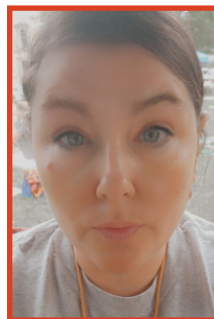
## New Roles & New Staff



**Amanda Verhagen** became Director of Camp & Respite Services in August 2024 where she previously served as the Nurse Coordinator from 2023-24. She first came to camp in 2021 as a counselor, then as an AmeriCorps member in 2022. Amanda grew up in Greenleaf, WI, attended Fox Valley Technical College where she received an Associate degree in Business Management in 2009 and attended Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, receiving an Associate degree in Nursing in 2023.



**Debra Riggs** began their role as Camp Administrative Assistant in October 2024. They first began working at Easterseals Wisconsin Camp Wawbeek as a summer camp counselor in 2021. Debra continued to work weekends and became the Camp Wawbeek Assistant Director in the summer of 2023. Debra grew up in Minneapolis, MN and attended college at DePaul University in Chicago, IL where they graduated in 2021 with a bachelor's degree in psychology with a concentration in human services and minored in studio art.



**Lauren Daniels** began as the Respite Camp Director in December 2024. She has been working with individuals with disabilities for over 20 years. Her experience covers all environments from school, home, workplaces, camp, and the community, in a variety of different positions. Most recently she was the Supervisor at Easterseals Southeast Wisconsin (ESSEW) serving their Recreation and Respite Members through Summer Day Camp, Adult Camp, and Recreation.

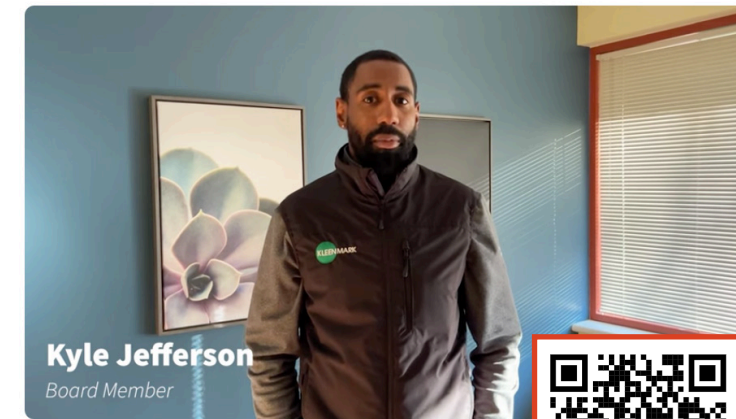


**Carson Sifford** joined Easterseals Wisconsin as AmeriCorps Program Manager in December 2024. Prior to this role, Carson served as a summer camp counselor at Camp Laurel South, located in Maine, for three summers and then as the Special Areas Director for three years. He is thrilled to be joining the camp team and is passionate about supporting inclusive programs that empower individuals and families.

*Would you like to be part of our terrific team?  
Visit: [www.EastersealsWisconsin.com/apply](http://www.EastersealsWisconsin.com/apply)  
to check out our open positions.*

# Recent Events • Recap

**GivingTuesday 2024** • Efforts for raising awareness and funding support for Easterseals Wisconsin on GivingTuesday received a bump in revenue thanks to Welton Enterprises match of \$1,000. This year, not only did the agency bring in new volunteers eagerly waiting for summer fundraising opportunities, we saw many new faces during the early winter months raising money through this global day of giving. Funds continued to trickle in even after the social media event closed and raised just over \$11,000!



**Kyle Jefferson**  
Board Member

*Kyle Jefferson and fellow board members share their "Why" during GivingTuesday. Scan the QR code above or visit: [www.eastersealswisconsin.com/gt](http://www.eastersealswisconsin.com/gt) to see the video and hear their messages!*



**Sporting Clays 2024** • Delta Dental, FritoLay, and Neuman Pools helped to raise over \$15,000 in support of agency programming at the 2024 Sporting Clays event. Next year's event is scheduled for October 3, 2025

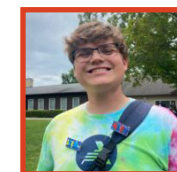


**Pancake Breakfast • 2024**

Key Club members joined camp staff for the annual pancake breakfast. This event helps to build a community around Camp Wawbeek and Wisconsin Elks/Easterseals Respite Camp. Approximately 100 individuals descended upon camp for all-you-can-eat pancakes and sausage. New and old friends shared stories and experiences, learning about the impact camp has on those that attend and their families. The Wisconsin Dells community supported through in-kind donations while others helped raise just over \$1,800.



# Meet our AmeriCorps Leadership Team



## Jacob Flees • Veterans Coordinator

Jacob has been with camp since February of 2024. He started out as a counselor during the spring. Over the summer, he served as an AmeriCorps Respite Apprentice and is currently the AmeriCorps Veterans Coordinator. Jacob grew up in Hatley, WI. He is attending the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, majoring in psychology. Jacob is graduating this spring (May 2025). After graduation, he plans to continue his education pursuing his master's in counseling.



## Hannah Morgan • Transitions Coordinator

Hannah joined Easterseals Wisconsin as AmeriCorps Transitions Coordinator in 2024. Prior to this role, she served as AmeriCorps Respite Apprentice during summer 2023. After this introduction to camp, Hannah immediately fell in love with the environment and the people she served. She is now serving her third AmeriCorps term.



## Jillian Turner • Volunteer Coordinator

Jillian joined the Easterseals Wisconsin team serving an AmeriCorps term during summer 2023 as a Respite Apprentice. She continued as a counselor into 2024 and worked as the Respite Assistant Director in summer 2024. She is currently serving her second AmeriCorps term as the Volunteer Coordinator from 2024-25.

# Generous Supporters Spotlight

**OttFest 2024 Raises Money for Easterseals Wisconsin** • Easterseals Wisconsin (ESW) was presented with a generous check for \$4,268 raised at the annual OttFest golf outing (which included a match from Pat LeMire, Board Chair of Easterseals Wisconsin). The donation was presented to ESW in November and represents the incredible growth and community values of the event, which was first launched in 2016 by Craig Ott, a neighbor and friend of LeMire.

What started as a small gathering of 12 golfers, OttFest saw an impressive turnout of 60 participants in 2024, all coming together for a day of friendly competition and philanthropy. Over the past few years, Ott has expanded the event's mission, directing proceeds to support local nonprofits.

**Women's Giving Collective Social** • Thank you to Kristen Eastman and TR McKenzie for sponsoring our latest Women's Giving Collective Social at Four Winds Farm. Guests participated in crafts and card making while learning more about what the Women's Giving Collective supports at ESW. The Women's Giving Collective is a newly-formed group of women leaders who support the organization's mission and services and are committed to supporting and empowering people with disabilities today and into the future.

**Sonnentag Foundation Grant Brings Upgrades to Camp** • Exciting upgrades are coming to Camp Wawbeek, thanks to an \$18,500 grant from the Sonnentag Foundation. This grant supports essential equipment upgrades, including replacing outdated washers and dryers, upgrading golf carts, and installing a new dining hall ice machine, all of which are necessary tools that ensure a smooth and accessible experience for campers and staff. This grant is part of ESW's ongoing efforts to enhance the camp experience and support the needs of campers and staff. The upgrades are expected to be completed before the start of the 2025 summer camp season.

**\$100,000 Grant Awarded for Castle Renovations** • Big things are in-store for Camp Wawbeek! We are thrilled to announce that we have been awarded a \$100,000 grant from the Otto Bremer Trust to support much-needed renovations of the beloved Castle, a historic and essential housing facility for our camp staff.

Originally the Upham family summer home before its donation to ESW in the 1930s, the Castle has long served as staff housing. However, time has taken its toll, and renovations are necessary to maintain its integrity and usability. This project includes crucial updates such as roof and chimney repairs, improved insulation, flooring and plaster repairs, modernized bathrooms, and the installation of heating and AC.

**New Respite Camp Amenities** • The Ability Experience, a program through Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity, continued its tradition of giving back by completing meaningful projects at Respite Camp. Volunteers worked together to build a sensory corner, a costume wardrobe, and closet shelves. The sensory corner offers a calm environment for campers to relax and engage with sensory tools. Meanwhile, the costume wardrobe brings fun and creativity to camp activities, allowing people to explore their individuality and imagination through dress-up and play. The newly built closet shelves will help keep the camp organized and make supplies more accessible to campers and staff alike.



# Celebrity Basketball Experience



## AN AFTERNOON OF FREE FAMILY FUN FOR A GREAT CAUSE!

**Saturday, April 12 • Madison College Skills Clinic • 1:00 • Registration Required**  
**Celebrity Game • 3:00**

Cheer on former Badger athletes as they hit the hardwood in support of children and adults with disabilities. Along with the celebrity game, this FREE, family-friendly event includes a pre-game basketball clinic (sign-up required), activities, games, prizes, and photos with Bucky Badger!

*This year don't miss out on our huge halftime mascot party featuring Bucky Badger, Bernie & the Racing Sausages, Maynard from the Mallards and more!*



# Upcoming Events

**Golf Outing for Kids • Tuesday, June 17 • Wild Rock Golf Club • Wisconsin Dells**  
Join us for one of Wisconsin's premier charity golf events – the Easterseals Wisconsin Golf Outing for Kids! All proceeds benefit Easterseals Wisconsin Camps for children and adults with disabilities located in Wisconsin Dells.

**Golf Fore FARM • Friday, August 8 • Marshfield Country Club • Marshfield**  
The Easterseals Wisconsin Golf Fore FARM is a charity event benefiting the Easterseals Wisconsin FARM Program. Each year, the program helps approximately 500 Wisconsin farmers remain in or return to farming after a disabling accident, illness, or medical condition.

**Sporting Clays Fundraiser • Friday, October 3 • Milford Hills • Johnson Creek**  
Join us for a day on the range! This fun sporting clays event at beautiful Milford Hills helps Easterseals Wisconsin provide unique programs and services to children and adults with disabilities across the Badger state.

*For event details please visit:*  
[www.eastersealswisconsin.com](http://www.eastersealswisconsin.com) or contact  
**Karen Boyle • [kboyle@eastersealswisconsin.com](mailto:kboyle@eastersealswisconsin.com)**



# Annual Campaign Kick Off

Each year, our annual campaign runs from March 1st to August 31st. Your support is vital to the continued legacy of our programs and services. Take a moment and listen to messages from those whom your gift directly impacts!



**Brian Baldo** is the sibling and guardian of camper, Daniel Tiger (Anthony). He shares about how impactful the programs have been to his family. Daniel gives some insight into the things that make camp so special to him.

Scan QR code or visit YouTube to watch: [www.eastersealswisconsin.com/youtube](http://www.eastersealswisconsin.com/youtube)



FARM client, **John Mitchell**, shares his story and offers advice to those going through similar circumstances, "When a person goes through an accident like this, you feel like your life is gone. Easterseals and AgrAbility changed my whole aspect on life."

# Support Our Mission

*I would like to support Easterseals Wisconsin's mission to increase independence, maximize opportunities, minimize barriers, and enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities.*

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ \$250 \_\_\_\_\_ \$500 \_\_\_\_\_ \$1000 \_\_\_\_\_ \$2000 \_\_\_\_\_ Other

### Please Print Clearly

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Check enclosed, made payable to Easterseals Wisconsin.

\_\_\_\_\_ My company provides matching gifts. (Please enclose form.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Please charge my Mastercard or Visa.

\_\_\_\_\_ Expires: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_

3-digit security code (from back of card) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Easterseals Wisconsin is included in my will.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please send me information about Legacy Giving.

Mail to:  
Easterseals Wisconsin  
1468 N. High Point Rd., Suite 202  
Middleton, WI 53562

Gifts can also be made online at:  
[www.eastersealswisconsin.com/donation/online-giving-form/](http://www.eastersealswisconsin.com/donation/online-giving-form/)

For internal use: 42350-146.4/rr

# Strengthening Connections for Small Businesses

**Marketplace Wisconsin Conference** • Ami Bliefernicht, Rural Rehabilitation Specialist at Easterseals Wisconsin (ESW), recently participated in the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's (WEDC) widely known Marketplace Wisconsin Conference, an event that encourages educational and networking opportunities for diversely owned small businesses across the state.

Held annually, the conference brings together entrepreneurs, community organizations, and support programs to engage in dialogue, exchange resources, and explore potential partnerships to uplift Wisconsin's small businesses.

As an exhibitor at the conference, Ami set up a booth representing ESW and its various programs, with a particular focus on the organization's Self-Employment Services. This program, one of several offered by ESW, is designed to help individuals with disabilities become successful entrepreneurs.

Beyond business plan development, the program connects clients to community resources, referrals to relevant classes, and other supports that might be beneficial. Specialists also assist with reviewing and refining business plans, ensuring that every aspect of the entrepreneurial journey is seamless. Ami's booth also highlighted the array of other services that ESW offers, which support people with disabilities in achieving greater independence and inclusion within the workforce.

For Ami, this event proved to be a success. "I made some great connections, especially with other agencies who work with those who could potentially use our services." She also engaged in conversation with agencies ESW could potentially connect or partner with in the future.

A key component of the Marketplace Wisconsin Conference is its focus on connecting organizations like ESW with businesses and nonprofits that can benefit from mutual collaboration. The event offered Ami a chance to forge relationships with other agencies and explore opportunities for ESW to partner with businesses or organizations to better support small business owners with disabilities.

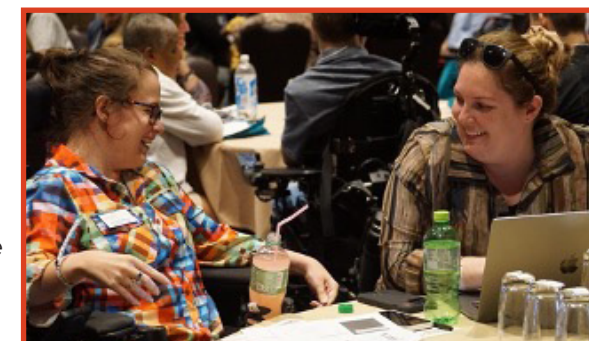
ESW's involvement in the conference further supports their partnership with the WEDC. Through this collaboration, WEDC and ESW come together to remove barriers, enhance opportunities, and increase independence for people with disabilities across Wisconsin. This allows the

program to serve an additional 12 people statewide during the first year.

"This partnership will allow us to support more entrepreneurs with disabilities, helping them achieve their goals and make meaningful contributions to their communities," Easterseals Wisconsin Director of FARM & Vocational Services Jeff Kratochwill said.

**Self-Determination Conference** • Ashley Parkhurst, Self-Employment Specialist at Easterseals Wisconsin, played a key role in connecting attendees with essential tools and resources at the annual Self-Determination Conference. The conference aims at empowering individuals with disabilities and their allies through collaboration and education.

Ashley, who hosted an informational booth at the conference, was there to not only share resources but also facilitate connections between organizations and communities. Her goal was to help people with disabilities and their allies learn about the resources available to them, from employment opportunities to health services.



*Pictured left: Ashley Parkhurst, Self-Employment Specialist for Easterseals Wisconsin*

The conference took place over three days at the Wisconsin Convention Center, and drew a diverse crowd of self-advocates, parents, providers, and community members. With a variety of presenters, exhibitors, and workshops, it provided a valuable opportunity for people to connect and network.

The conference proved to be impactful for Ashley. "I was able to make some good connections with organizations to do presentations," she said. Ashley is excited to further these new connections, and provide more people with the knowledge and resources they need to advocate for themselves and others with disabilities. As she looks ahead to future collaborations and connections, she's focused on expanding her reach and making sure that the voices of disabled individuals are amplified.