

# Annual Report 2025

**50** YEARS  
OF SERVICE



Annual Report 2025		Social Work Office of Research & Public Service	
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# Fifty Years of Impact, Innovation, & Heart (1975-2025)

In 1975, the University of Tennessee College of Social Work launched a small Continuing Education program to bring training and new ideas to social workers across the state. No one could have predicted that this modest initiative would grow into a statewide enterprise shaping public systems and family outcomes. What began as continuing education became continuity of purpose—a commitment to linking learning, research, and real-world impact. Fifty years later, SWORPS stands as a living testament to that promise, bridging knowledge and compassion, data and humanity.

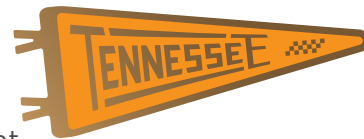


Henson Hall

## 1970s

### Foundation: Building the Bridge Between Research and Service

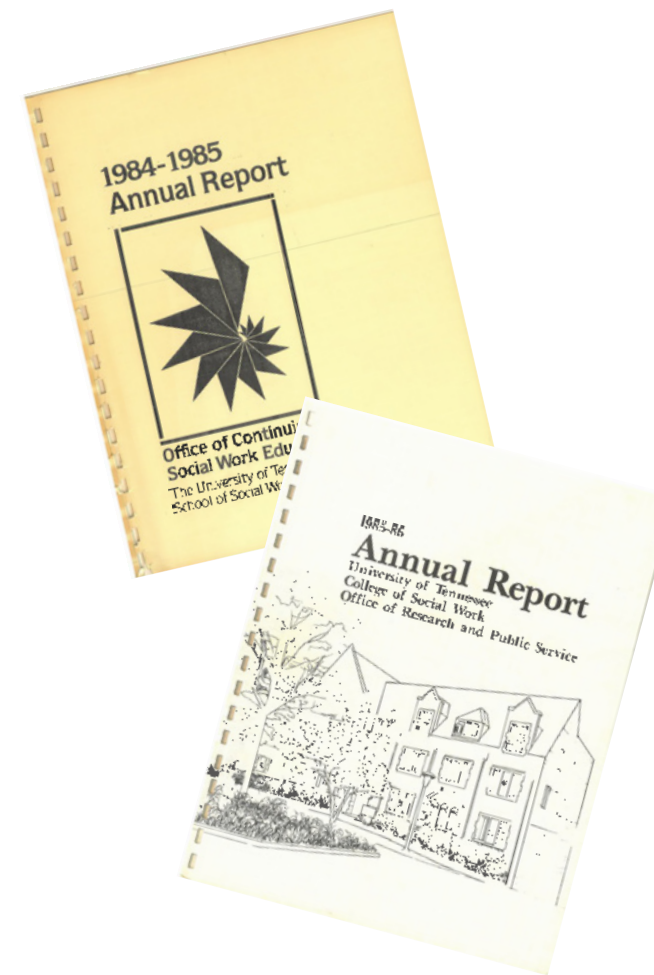
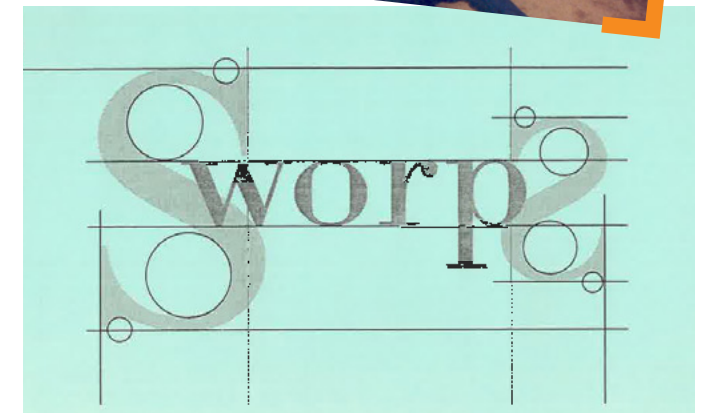
SWORPS was born out of a conviction that the University should not only generate knowledge but also apply it where it matters most—in the lives of Tennesseans. The early years were marked by small grants, big dreams, and an unshakable belief that systems could be both efficient and humane. It was a time of experimentation, partnership, and groundwork that laid the foundation for a future rooted in both rigor and empathy.



## 1980s

### Partnership and Identity

As the program's reach expanded through state contracts and community collaborations, it found its identity and its name: the Social Work Office of Research and Public Service—SWORPS. The 1980s marked a turning point, transforming a university training hub into a statewide partner in service. SWORPS became known for bridging the academic and public sectors, translating ideas into action and research into results.



## 1990s

### Growth: Expanding Across Tennessee

By the 1990s, SWORPS had become a trusted partner for state agencies and community organizations. Its researchers and practitioners began to weave data-driven insights into the fabric of public service. From child welfare and early education to community development and housing, SWORPS' footprint grew—and so did its reputation for integrity, excellence, and innovation.





# 2000s

## Innovation: Technology Joins the Mission

The new millennium ushered in a digital transformation. SWORPS embraced technology as a catalyst for service, launching custom-built systems that improved data collection, training, and communication statewide. The integration of human services expertise with technical innovation became a signature of the organization—a model of how technology can serve individuals and families.



# 2010s

## Integration: Research, Service, and Tech Unite

The decade that followed saw SWORPS evolve into a unified, multidisciplinary powerhouse. The seeds for the current divisions of Technology and Development, Applied Research and Evaluation, and Field-Based Services were planted with multidisciplinary projects that involved sharing data, insights, and infrastructure.



# 2020s

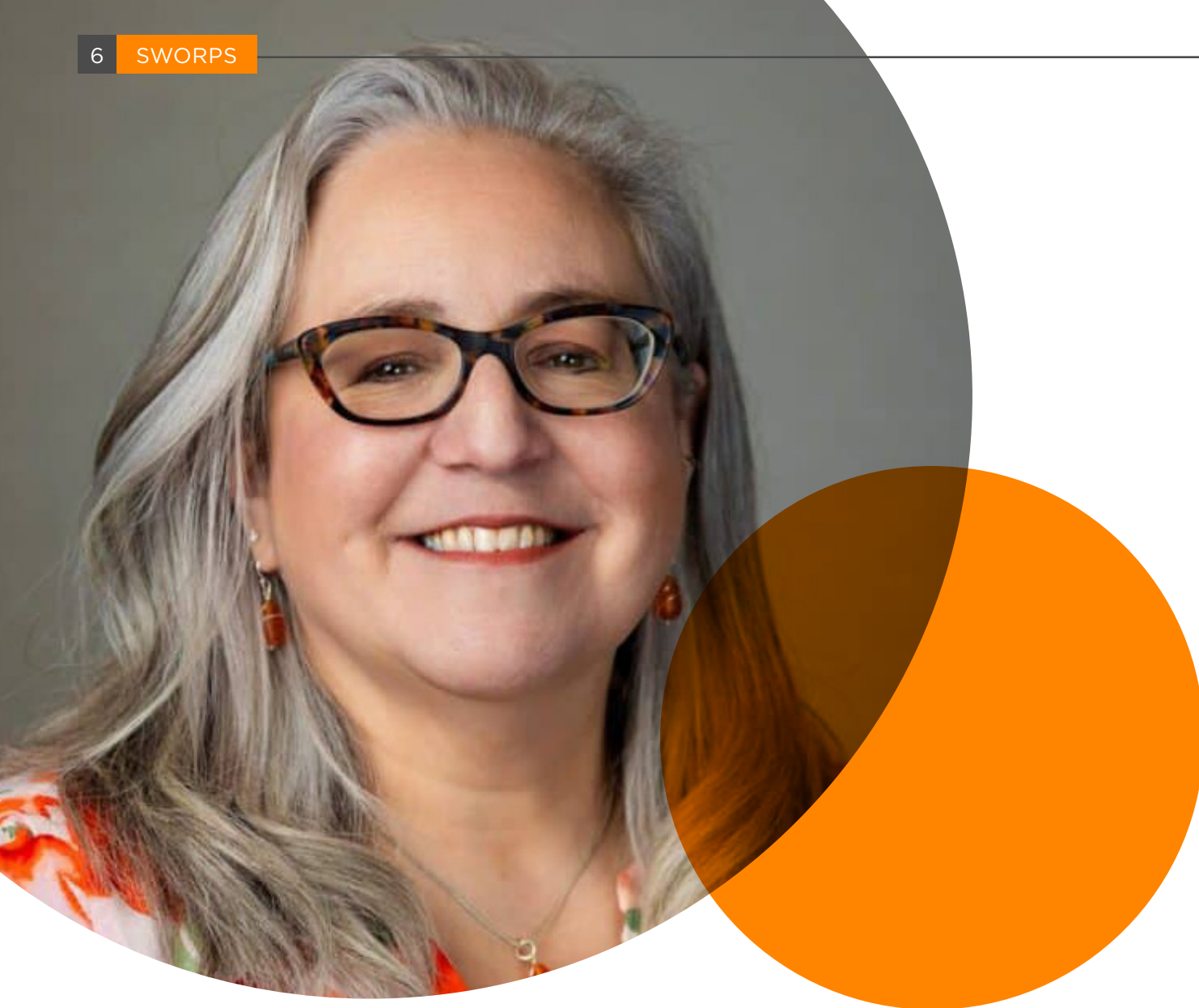
## Transformation: From Impact to Legacy

Fifty years after its founding, SWORPS has evolved into a \$33 million statewide enterprise powered by 175 professionals who combine intellect, innovation, and heart. Its three interdependent divisions have become a model for how a university-embedded center can transform partnership into progress and data into lasting change.

SWORPS operates as the outreach arm of the College of Social Work but functions with the agility of a mission-driven nonprofit—integrating research, field work, and technology to improve lives. As we celebrate fifty years, we also look forward to the next generation of partnerships, innovations, and possibilities.







## From the Dean

For fifty years, SWORPS has embodied the University of Tennessee's highest calling: to translate knowledge into action for the public good. It is a living bridge between academia and community, a place where ideas become solutions and partnerships become progress. I am proud of how SWORPS has grown, evolved, and led, and deeply grateful for the people whose hearts and minds make this work possible. As we celebrate this milestone, we renew our commitment to ensuring that every Tennessean has the opportunity to thrive.

— Dr. Lori Messinger

# Messages from Leadership



## From the Associate Dean for Research

SWORPS is proof that research and real-world practice can exist not only side by side, but also in service to one another. Its teams combine evidence, innovation, and empathy to help systems learn, adapt, and improve. As we enter the next fifty years, SWORPS continues to model the kind of applied scholarship our nation needs—collaborative, responsive, and relentlessly focused on impact.

— Dr. J. Douglas Coatsworth



## From the Director

We are built to last—and driven to evolve. Over five decades, SWORPS has grown from a handful of dreamers into a statewide force for good. Our sustainability comes from the way we grow without losing sight of who we are: mission-driven, people-centered, and accountable professionals to the families and communities we serve. Every project, every partnership, every innovation is an act of faith in what's possible when we align knowledge with compassion. To our staff, our partners, and the people we serve—thank you for fifty years of trust. The next chapter begins now.

— Daryl Kennedy Chansuthus



## SWORPS: Fifty Years of Progress Through Partnership

At its core, SWORPS is a promise kept—a promise that knowledge and compassion can coexist and change lives. From the beginning, our work has been guided by partnership: with state agencies, nonprofits, schools, courts, and communities. That collaborative spirit remains our compass as we navigate a rapidly changing world.

In FY25, SWORPS continued to grow as a trusted ally to state and local systems. We expanded prevention and permanency initiatives with the Department of Children's Services, launched new research partnerships with the Department of Human Services, and supported a growing portfolio of community-based projects that strengthen families, improve public systems, and build healthier communities.

# Division of Applied Research & Evaluation (DARE)

## EVIDENCE THAT DRIVES CHANGE

DARE remains the intellectual engine of SWORPS—turning data into direction, research into reform, and evaluation into evolution. In FY25, DARE deepened its impact through innovative partnerships that span prevention, education, and public health.

DARE's hallmark is integration—bridging data and empathy to deliver insight that leads to action. Its work continues to influence policy and improve lives across Tennessee.

### FY25 Highlights

Partnered with **23 organizations** from around the country to gather, analyze, and apply data in collaborative efforts to impact policy and practice and improve lives.



Began **major studies** in early childhood educator access to training, fatherhood programs across Tennessee, and the contribution of faith-based organizations to Tennessee's most vulnerable citizens.

Began **6 new partnerships** that addressed applied research and evaluation in areas as divergent as opioid abatement, guaranteed income, and Alzheimer's care.

Authored over **40 reports** to support improved practice and policy making for community partners.



**41**  
surveys launched

**36,000+**  
individual responses analyzed

## Research and Partnerships

### Tennessee DHS Research Consortium

Laid the foundation for a groundbreaking collaboration and research agenda that moves social support systems from transactional to transformational.



### Project TLC - City of Knoxville

Partnered with the City of Knoxville to address gun violence through community engagement and data-informed strategy.

### ALICE Family Stability Matrix

Co-developed with frontline providers a digital tool to track progress toward self-sufficiency using real-world metrics.



### Community Registered Nurse Navigator (CRNN) Evaluation

Partnered with the College of Nursing to assess statewide vaccine outreach and access.

### Tennessee DCS FFPSA Implementation Evaluation

Collaborated with the Department of Children's Services to evaluate how Family First Prevention Services Act strategies take shape in practice—examining alignment between vision and implementation and identifying the conditions that allow prevention to thrive.

Applied Research & Evaluation:  
Listening that Improves Lives

All DARE researchers and evaluators gather data, but whether these data are gathered through surveys or focus groups or individual interviews, this gathering is really a careful and systematic listening: to people, for context, for meaning. In DARE we craft careful questions so that our listening leads to solutions that help the people who are kind enough, concerned enough, or even brave enough to share their truth with us.





SWORPS' hands-on involvement went far beyond traditional evaluation practices. They provided invaluable input into the overall delivery of care and developed unique evaluation techniques to assess the project accordingly. **They were an integral part of our leadership team assisting with project administration and dissemination.** They even went out of their scope to work alongside our team in the community to provide care and support other team members in their day-to-day activities.



## Looking Ahead

As DARE looks to the future, we are planning innovative new methods for gathering data and gleaning wisdom from the people who respond to our surveys and our questions. We are always listening and learning. This year we plan to help our partners make Tennessee a safer place to live, with more affordable, more accessible, and higher quality early childhood education, and with more supports that keep families safe, stable, and thriving. In addition to our vital reporting, we plan to increase our publications and presentations so that our work and the work of our partners continues to improve lives in Tennessee and beyond.

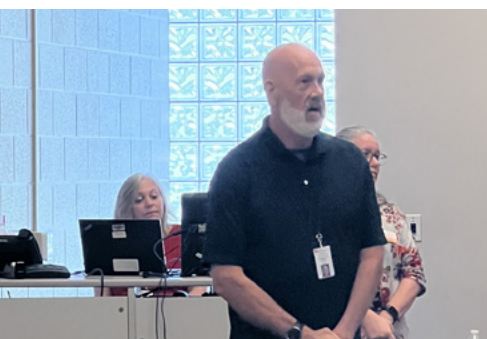
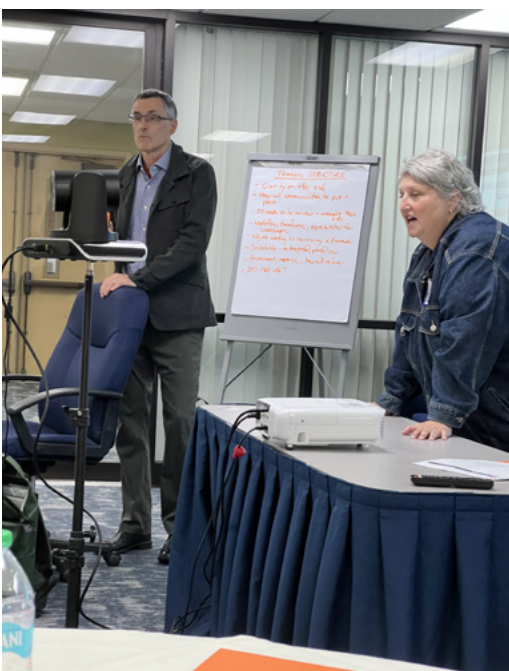
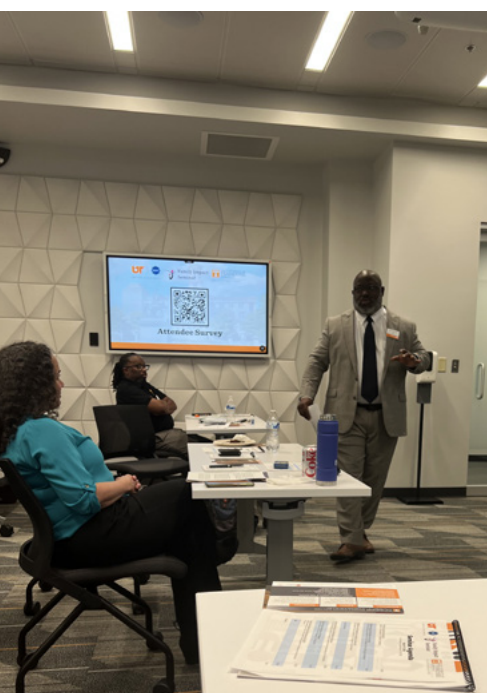




# Division of Field-Based Services (FBS)

## WHERE IMPACT LIVES

If DARE is the brain of SWORPS, Field-Based Services is its beating heart. Across Tennessee, our field teams walk beside families, practitioners, and communities—delivering coaching, training, coordination, and support that strengthens families and prevents unnecessary system involvement. The division includes a diverse portfolio of programs united by one mission: to strengthen family stability, empower caregivers, and ensure that every child grows up safe, connected, and cared for.



## Tennessee Child Support Employment & Parenting Program (TCSEPP)

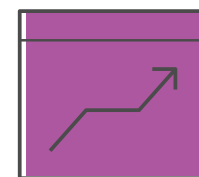
The Tennessee Child Support Employment and Parenting Program continues to change lives across the state by helping noncustodial parents secure employment, reconnect with their children, and meet their child support obligations. The program's success lies in its holistic approach: combining job readiness, financial literacy, and parenting education with compassionate coaching and accountability.



Behind every number is a story of resilience. One father, recently reunited with his children after years of struggle, told his coordinator, *"You didn't just help me find a job—you helped me find myself again."* TCSEPP continues to prove that when systems invest in people's potential instead of punishing their past, families thrive.



## FY25 Highlights



# 1,667

participants served  
13.2% increase over last year

# 82%

reported increased self-sufficiency  
within two weeks of exit

# \$1.86 million

in child support payments made  
+22% over FY24



# 80.4%

employed while enrolled;

# two-thirds

secured new employment

# 97%

would recommend TCSEPP to others





## Northeast Relative Caregiver Program (RCP)

Funded by the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services, the Northeast RCP helps relatives—often grandparents—care for children at risk of entering foster care. Through stipends, coaching, and connection, the program provides both practical and emotional support that keeps families together.

*“You should see their faces,”* one caregiver said after using stipend savings for a family trip to Washington, D.C. *“They’re glued to the window.”*

Beyond numbers, RCP’s impact is deeply human. When devastating floods swept through the region, Family Coaches—many personally affected—continued to deliver supplies and check on families. One caregiver called it *“proof that family is more than blood—it’s community.”*

### FY25 Highlights

**419**  
individuals served  
(185 caregivers, 234 children)

**3,202**  
outreach activities conducted

**99.8%**  
of children remained safely with family

**38%**  
reduction in financial assistance use  
from FY24 to FY25

**52%**  
of caregivers reported reduced stress

## Citizen Review Panels & Children’s Justice Task Force

SWORPS coordinates Tennessee’s four Citizen Review Panels and the statewide Children’s Justice Task Force, convening stakeholders across child welfare, education, healthcare, and the courts. Together, they evaluate and improve child protection systems through data, dialogue, and shared accountability.

*“Bringing everyone together is incredibly beneficial and needed,”* said one panel chair. *“It’s how we build solutions that last.”*



### FY25 Achievements

**17**  
meetings convened  
across panels and task force

**Developed**  
Juvenile Court booklet  
co-authored by youth

**Updated**  
Child Protective Investigative Team manual  
released new Erin’s Law guidance

**Advanced**  
Truancy Reduction Initiatives  
through cross-sector collaboration



## FFPSA Regional Prevention Consultants Program

Through the Family First Prevention Services Act, SWORPS’ Prevention Consultants coached and collaborated with frontline DCS teams to help families access evidence-based services that keep children safely at home. In FY25, consultants’ recommendations directly prevented custody in dozens of cases. Judges, caseworkers, and community partners alike praised their expertise and responsiveness.

One DCS supervisor shared, *“Because of your input, we were able to find services that stabilized the family and averted placement. You made all the difference.”*





Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R)

SWORPS partners with Signal Centers, funded by the Tennessee Department of Human Services, to deliver CCR&R services across Eastern and Northeastern Tennessee, offering coaching, technical assistance, and professional development to strengthen early learning. CCR&R connects programs to resources, supports educators, and promotes quality care—building a skilled, stable workforce for families statewide.



Technical Assistance & Coaching (unduplicated counts)

Average number of participants served through technical assistance with Coaching:  
**East: 695; Upper East: 293**

Average number of participants served through technical assistance without Coaching:  
**East: 1,433; Upper East: 649**

Total technical assistance contacts:  
**2,296 (both regions)**

Professional Development & Training

Participants in the New Educator Academy: **26**

Participants Completing Specialization Tracks

- Infant/Toddler Specialization: **8**
- Preschool Specialization: **12**
- Literacy Specialization: **10**
- Family/Group Specialization: **4**
- Small Business Specialization: **11**

FY25 Achievements

**Delivered**  
targeted, relationship-based coaching  
tailored to the needs of child care educators  
and directors

**Provided**  
technical assistance  
to support licensing compliance, quality  
improvement planning, and implementation

**Offered**  
accessible professional development  
including virtual, in-person, and on-demand  
options—to meet providers where they are

**Strengthened**  
early educator pipelines  
through the New Educator Academy and  
multiple specialization tracks

**Collaborated**  
with Signal Centers and DHS  
to align regional support with statewide  
priorities and workforce needs

Program Engagement

Programs receiving on-site coaching:  
**88 providers (unduplicated)**

Providers engaging in virtual or on-demand PD:  
**909 participants /10 providers**

Directors/Owners Receiving Business or Quality Improvement Support

Small Business (Technical Assistance):  
**332 participants / 137 providers**

Quality Child Care Support (Technical Assistance):  
**215 professionals trained / 39 providers**

Knoxville Homeless Management Information System (KnoxHMIS) and CHAMP

Administered by SWORPS’ Field-Based Services division, KnoxHMIS and CHAMP serve as the data and coordination entry backbone for Knoxville and Knox County’s integrated response to homelessness. These systems enable real-time collaboration among 25 agencies and 80 programs, improving outcomes for more than 8,600 individuals experiencing homelessness.



“HMIS is an invaluable tool for tracking services and ensuring accurate reporting. It helps us monitor progress, reduce duplication, and ultimately better serve our clients.”  
—Erin Lang, Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee

FY25 Achievements

**847**  
CHAMP households exited from homelessness  
to permanent housing

**130**  
meetings facilitated and  
**75**  
strategy sessions supported

**Perfect**  
HUD performance scores  
for bed coverage and data accuracy

Together, these programs form the front line of SWORPS’ service mission—turning partnership into progress and compassion into measurable change.



# Division of Technology & Development (DTD)

## POWERING CONNECTION

Technology is not an accessory at SWORPS—it is the nervous system that connects everything we do. The Division of Technology and Development (DTD) designs, builds, and maintains the digital tools that empower partners across Tennessee to deliver services efficiently and equitably. With more than 70 professionals specializing in software development, instructional design, project management, data management, systems oversight, and help desk support, DTD transforms complex human service systems into streamlined, user-friendly solutions.

## Empowering Innovation, Supporting Growth

From its earliest days, DTD has built tools that do more than store data. They tell stories, reveal impact, and help guide change. The team's work ensures that caseworkers, educators, and administrators have the information they need at their fingertips, while frontline professionals experience smoother, more responsive services.



### TrainTN

Continued to support the growth of Tennessee's early childhood workforce by providing a statewide hub for professional development, tracking training completion, certifications, and licensing requirements.



### Training and Technical Assistance Manager (TAM)

Enhanced the TAM database application which oversees training and technical assistance provided to child care educators through TDHS Child Care and Development Fund partners. This year, DTD continued to integrate systems and strengthen collaboration among partners, adapting its tools and resources to meet the needs of a rapidly modernizing early education landscape.



### TNPAL

Took on the hosting, development, and support of TNPAL, Tennessee's comprehensive early childhood workforce registry. This platform empowers educators to manage their credentials, track ongoing professional development, and meet state licensing standards—all while helping agencies and policymakers strengthen the early education workforce through accurate, statewide data.



### Signal Centers Integrated Database

Developed and supported a custom, unified case management system serving six Signal Centers programs, providing coordinated access to assessments, services, and progress tracking.



### TN-ELAP

TN-ELAP.org is a web-based database application that supports Tennessee Department of Education-funded afterschool programs. This statewide product collects and manages statewide data on activities, participation, and program outcomes to strengthen reporting and accountability. In 2025, new features were added to enable API integration with federal reporting systems, reducing duplication of effort and streamlining data submission.



## Stories of Service and Support

Behind every DTD product is a story of collaboration and care. When Tennessee educators needed a simpler way to manage their professional development hours, DTD responded with TrainTN—an elegant platform that makes continuing education accessible and transparent. When child care centers across the state sought help applying for stabilization grants, the DTD Help Desk became a lifeline, answering thousands of calls with patience and precision.

***“This grant is going to benefit the children in my rural child care center in ways you can’t imagine . . . Because of your help, we can finally meet our quality goals.”***

These stories echo DTD’s philosophy: that technology is most powerful when it amplifies human potential.

## Key Services & Areas of Impact



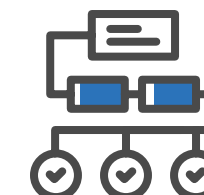
**Software Development:**  
Custom Solutions for  
Complex Challenges



**Help Desk Support:**  
Reliable Assistance for  
Every Need



**Learning Consultation:**  
Empowering Through  
Education



**Project Management:**  
Delivering Results, Ensuring  
Success



## Looking Ahead

DTD continues to modernize and expand its reach through a range of initiatives that enhance efficiency, accessibility, and impact. The team is advancing sophisticated training methodologies, implementing Agile project management practices, and migrating legacy systems to secure, cloud-based architectures. Artificial intelligence is one of many tools supporting this transformation with use always guided by principles of transparency, security, and a steadfast commitment to policy and privacy.



# Finance & Operations and Human Resources

## THE BACKBONE OF SWORPS

Every strong organization stands on a foundation of accountability, stewardship, and care. For SWORPS, that foundation is the Business Office—two integrated teams that together make excellence possible: Finance & Operations and Human Resources.

Working in partnership, these teams ensure that SWORPS' statewide mission is supported by systems that are sound, people who are empowered, and processes that are transparent. They are the calm in the storm, the steady hands behind the scenes, and the problem solvers who turn complexity into clarity.



### FY25 Highlights

## Supported

rapid grant expansion and multi-state compliance  
for over \$33 million in active funding.

## Streamlined

onboarding, recruitment, and  
professional development  
for a growing workforce of 175 staff.

## Strengthened

internal policies to align with university standards  
while maintaining SWORPS' flexibility and  
responsiveness.

## Advanced

workforce engagement, recognition, and  
wellness initiatives  
to promote belonging and sustainability.

## A Culture of Service and Stewardship

The SWORPS Business Office is responsible for the full lifecycle of our grants and contracts—managing both pre- and post-award activities to ensure fiscal integrity and compliance. The Finance & Operations team partners closely with Principal Investigators and project leaders to develop, review, and monitor budgets, ensuring that every expenditure is accurate, allowable, and aligned with best fiscal practice.

Alongside them, the Human Resources team supports SWORPS' most valuable asset—its people—through responsive recruitment, onboarding, and professional development initiatives that foster belonging and build capacity.

In a year of record growth and change, both teams worked tirelessly to ensure that innovation was matched by accountability and that every member of our staff felt supported, valued, and equipped to do their best work. Together, they enable every division—from field teams to developers—to focus on what matters most: improving the lives of Tennesseans.

## Looking Ahead

As SWORPS enters its next half-century, the Business Office will continue to strengthen the systems and structures that sustain the organization's growth and integrity.

In FY26, priorities include streamlining, clarifying, and documenting key fiscal and operational workflows; strengthening financial forecasting and grant management systems;

enhancing compliance through regular expenditure reviews; and investing in team capacity and institutional knowledge.

These efforts reflect a commitment not only to precision but to integrity, transparency, and continuous improvement—ensuring that the foundation of SWORPS remains as strong and forward-looking as the mission it supports.



# Because of SWORPS: Voices of the Journey

These reflections, gathered from staff and partners across Tennessee, capture the spirit of SWORPS—innovation anchored in humanity.

“

I LEARNED THAT DATA CAN BE COMPASSIONATE WHEN IT'S USED TO HELP FAMILIES, NOT JUDGE THEM.”

“I learned that progress isn't about perfection—it's about persistence, partnership, and purpose.”

“I saw how evidence and empathy can coexist, and together they can change the trajectory of a child's life.”

“ I found my home.”

“I've seen technology become a bridge, not a barrier, between people who need help and those who can offer it.”

“I built a career, created a team, and discovered my purpose.”

“ I PUT RESEARCH SKILLS AT THE SERVICE OF VULNERABLE TENNESSEANS.”

“

I realized that innovation starts with listening.

”

“I found my voice as a practitioner and discovered that small acts of care can shift entire systems.”

“

I SAW LEADERS MODEL INTEGRITY AND COURAGE IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY, REMINDING US WHO WE ARE AND WHY WE SERVE.”

“

I understood that public service is not a job—it's a calling.”



I found colleagues who became collaborators, and collaborators who became lifelong friends.”



# Paving the Way for the Next 50

As we look toward the horizon, we do so with gratitude and resolve. The work ahead calls for courage, collaboration, and imagination. We will continue to

- Deepen prevention-to-permanency practice statewide.
- Advance innovative, ethically-grounded, person-centered technology.
- Expand applied research that translates evidence into everyday impact.
- Invest in our people—the heart of SWORPS.

For fifty years, we have walked beside Tennesseans. As we step into the next fifty, we will continue to partner with purpose—clearing the way, lighting the path, and building upon a legacy of integrity, collaboration, and quiet excellence.

Thank you for fifty years of trust, partnership, and purpose.



