

2025

Summer Messenger



Dear Friends and Supporters,

Advocacy is at the heart of everything we do at Emmaus. It is more than just our responsibility; it is our commitment to ensuring that every person we serve has a voice, is treated with dignity, and has access to the opportunities they deserve.

At Emmaus, we champion the rights of individuals with disabilities, breaking barriers and building a more inclusive world. True advocacy means engaging with policymakers, communities, and organizations to create meaningful change. It means standing together to ensure that every individual can live, work, and thrive with independence and respect.

In this issue of The Messenger, we share powerful stories about advocacy, including Susie, a mother with a developmental disability, who learned to use her voice to create meaningful changes that will impact lives for generations to come.



Your voice matters more now than ever.

Over the past several weeks we have experienced several setbacks in our efforts to fund our work. First, Governor Kehoe vetoed our 1.25% rate increase. Annual increases are necessary to ensure that we can pay competitive wages to our team members who work tirelessly to support our clients.

But the largest impact on providers like Emmaus came from the 'One Big Beautiful Bill Act'. Ironically, this bill, which was signed by the President on July 4th, may be the single greatest threat to people with disabilities since the inception of the Medicaid program more than 60 years ago.

The bill is estimated to cut \$1 trillion in Medicaid funding over the next 10 years. Estimates are that Missouri will lose \$17 billion in federal Medicaid funding over the next decade. This represents a 14% reduction in Medicaid funding for the state. While none of the cuts were specific to home and community-based services, states will have wide latitude regarding the administration of their Medicaid programs, and we will need to work diligently to protect these vital services.

Our work must continue. And your voice matters more than ever.

Please join us in our advocacy efforts by contacting legislators, raising awareness, or simply fostering inclusion in your own community. Your action contributes to a brighter future for adults with developmental disabilities.

Emmaus remains dedicated to empowering lives through advocacy, and we invite you to join us in this critical work. Together, we can amplify voices, inspire change, and build a society where all individuals are valued and supported.

Thank you for being an advocate and champion for those we serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cindy Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Cindy Clark

President & CEO
Emmaus Homes

THE HEISEL FAMILY LEGACY:

A Tradition of Love and Service

The Heisel family's connection to Emmaus is a story rooted in love, faith, and generations of quiet generosity.

It began with Esther Roedder, who lived and worked on the Marthasville campus in the 1960's and 1970's. Her sister, Alice, supported both her and Emmaus by creating Ivory soap dolls for the Bazaar and handcrafting a quilt each year for the quilt auction. These small acts of care helped raise funds and planted the first seeds of a family legacy.

Alice's daughter, Joan Heisel, carried that tradition forward. A nurse by profession and a caregiver by nature, Joan served on the Emmaus Board of Directors and volunteered her time and skills to support the mission. She and her husband, Jim, were faithful members of Pilgrim UCC in Labadie, MO for many years before moving to St. Peters United Church of Christ in Washington, MO, where they lived out their values through a lifelong commitment to Emmaus.

Their daughters, Amy, Nancy, and Peggy, grew up visiting their great-aunt Esther on campus, building relationships with the people we serve and becoming part of the Emmaus family.

Joan was known for her gentle spirit; Jim, for his warmth and easy smile. Together, they lived a life of kindness and faith.

When Joan passed in 2010 and Jim in 2024, they left behind a generous estate gift to Emmaus. In their honor, we have named a training room in our Learning Lab after them, a space where our nurse trainer equips staff with the skills needed to provide exceptional support.

It is a fitting tribute to a nurse, a family, and a legacy built on compassion. **The Heisel family reminds us that when you share Emmaus with your loved ones, the impact grows—across generations.**



HOW THE EMMAUS GIVING TREE

Can Change a Life



At Emmaus, the Giving Tree is more than just a holiday tradition; it is a powerful reminder that every person deserves to feel seen, valued, and empowered. For many clients, one small gift can become the beginning of something life changing.

Last Christmas, a client received a simple set of gardening tools through the Giving Tree—a few shovels, gloves, a rake, and clippers. To some, it may have seemed like a kind gesture. But to this individual, it was the spark that reignited a lifelong interest in plants and launched a brand-new balcony garden.

With this gift, our client found purpose in nurturing plant clippings, growing tomatoes from offshoots, and is excited to share the harvest with his housemates. The tools became more than just equipment—they became a way to connect with others, give back to loved ones, and grow something meaningful. Even a cherished family connection was deepened through a plan to gift a homegrown plant to their parents.

This same client is also building independence through a part-time job and dreaming of future opportunities. But it is the personal touches—the Giving Tree gift, the encouragement to pursue a passion, and the chance to share joy with others—that helps those we serve flourish.

The Emmaus Giving Tree is not just about what is wrapped in paper—it is about what is unwrapped in the heart. A single gift can plant seeds of confidence, joy, and belonging that continue to grow long after the holidays have passed.



As we look ahead to the next holiday season, we are kicking off our **Christmas in July** campaign to ensure every Emmaus client experiences that same joy and sense of inclusion. This summer, your generosity can help us provide a personalized gift for each of the 230+ clients we serve—something they can unwrap on Christmas morning and know they are loved. Join us in spreading cheer a little early. Together, we can make this holiday season truly unforgettable.

CHRISTMAS in July! (...and August!)



Giving open through
August!

Summer is here, but Christmas is on our minds at Emmaus! Your summer gift plants the seeds of joy and belonging for every Emmaus client to unwrap this December.

SUSIE'S Story

Susie Parker has always had a powerful voice. In fact, in her early days, she earned the nickname “Mouth of the South,” a title that hinted at both her tenacity and outspoken nature. But over the years, Susie has transformed that spark of outspoken passion into strategic advocacy and leadership, becoming a respected member of the Emmaus Board of Directors.

Susie’s journey was neither easy nor predictable. Born into a family that did not fully understand her needs, she spent much of her early life unaware that she had a disability. As a result, Susie struggled—misunderstood by teachers, surrounded by peers who learned differently, and lacking the support that could have helped her succeed.

“I was not the best student,” Susie recalled. “My brain just works differently, but I did not understand that back then.”

She lost her father when she was young and became an orphan at sixteen. Susie found herself with few options. Eventually, she made her way to Missouri, where a pivotal Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting would reveal for the first time that she had been navigating the world with undiagnosed disabilities all along.

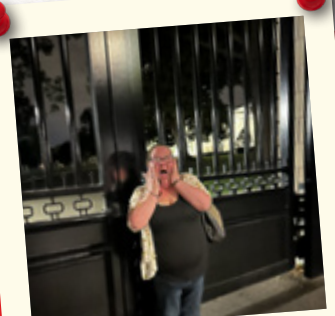
Still, Susie persevered. She finished high school and became involved with People First, an organization dedicated to self-advocacy. At first, she resisted. “I told my friend I did not belong there,” she said. “She told me I absolutely did—and that I had a voice that could make a difference.”

Susie’s true journey into advocacy ignited with the birth of her son. When Susie became pregnant, she proudly introduced her support staff at her doctor’s visit. The doctor’s reaction was swift and cruel. He stopped speaking to Susie and directed his attention to her staff, asking, “How could you let this happen?”

“I was proud to have support staff,” Susie said. “But in that moment, I realized how the world still viewed people like me.”

Her son’s early life was shadowed by constant scrutiny. In his first year alone, Susie was investigated by child protective services more than 40 times. Each investigation ended the same way—with Susie’s child still by her side and the scrutiny unfounded.

Rather than retreat, Susie responded with action. She testified in support of legislation that would make it illegal in Missouri to use disability as the sole reason to remove a child from a parent. Her testimony was crucial, and she was invited by then-Governor Nixon to attend the bill’s signing.



“That moment meant everything,” Susie said. “Because I could not stop what had happened to me, but I could help prevent it from happening to someone else.”

Today, her son is a high school graduate and is preparing for his first year at Washington University in St. Louis. Her son symbolizes the full-circle achievement of Susie’s dedication. “It’s the most beautiful, unplanned moment of my life,” Susie remarks emotionally, celebrating the extraordinary milestone as proof that her resilience and advocacy truly matter.

Susie’s involvement with Emmaus began with personal connections to individuals receiving services and the direct support professionals she befriended. Initially skeptical about Emmaus, given her outspoken advocacy for community-based living rather than institutional or campus settings, Susie quickly saw Emmaus aligning with the same values she held dear. She recognized that Emmaus was proactively transitioning from institutional campuses to integrated community settings before many others. “Emmaus was already ahead of everyone else,” she explains. “They were starting to move individuals into community settings where they could live next to whoever they wanted.”

Joining the Emmaus Board of Directors was a significant moment for Susie. As a person with a developmental disability to serve on the board, Susie understood the magnitude of her role. “I had to ask myself, am I sitting at this table to check a box, or because they value what I have to say?” she said, “I have never had to question that at Emmaus.”

As a board member, Susie brings her whole self—her experience, insight, and her unwavering commitment to transparency. She urges board members to attend town halls, show up for staff award presentations, and hear directly from those receiving services.

“I believe leadership should be present, not distant,” she said. “That is how we build trust and make real change.”

Her presence on the board is more than symbolic. It is a powerful reminder of why representation matters. “If you do not have someone with lived experience at the table, then you are just guessing,” she said.

Susie no longer lives up to the title “Mouth of the South,” but she has not lost her voice. It has become clearer, wiser, and deeply rooted in purpose. Her journey—from misunderstood student to celebrated advocate—stands out as an example of what is possible when someone is given not only the chance to speak but also the space to lead.

“I do not just bring perspective,” she said. “I bring value. And I want to make sure others like me have the chance to do the same.”



THANK YOU, GETTEMEIERS!

A big thank you to **GETTEMEIERS ST. PETERS** for generously donating lunch to our golfers at the Emmaus Annual Golf Tournament on April 25! Their support fueled a fantastic day on the course. Next time you are deciding where to eat out, be sure to visit Gettemeiers and show them some love!



WAVES OF INSPIRATION: SAVE THE DATE!



**WAVES OF
INSPIRATION**

Emmaus invites you to join us for our fourth annual Waves of Inspiration event, scheduled for **SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2025!** Tickets go on sale on **August 1, 2025** at emmaushomes.org/event.

Get
Involved!

