

QUARTERLY INFORMER

APRIL, MAY, AND JUNE 2025 EDITION

FHFSWLA Board of Directors

Chair

Molly Morgan

Vice Chair

Leslie Knox

Treasurer

Bernadette Courville

Secretary

Kimberlee Gazzolo

Mona Timpa

Howard Foreman

Leah Fuselier

Khaja Moinuddin

Scotty Higginbotham

Rachel McClelland

FHF SWLA Mission:

Our mission is to enable and empower individuals with disabilities and their families by providing information, referral, education, training, peer support and advocacy skills.



You Matter Too: Advocating for Parents and Caregivers

As families of individuals with disabilities, we often find ourselves in constant advocacy mode—pushing for the right services, inclusion, accessibility, and respect for our loved ones. But in the midst of fighting for what our children or family members need, it's easy to forget something just as important: we matter too.

Parents and caregivers play an essential role in the lives of individuals with disabilities. We juggle appointments, therapies, school meetings, medical decisions, and daily care routines. We become experts, problem-solvers, and champions for our loved ones. But the emotional, physical, and financial toll is real—and it often goes unacknowledged.

That's why advocating for ourselves as caregivers is just as important as advocating for our family members. We deserve access to support systems that give us the time to breathe—respite care, parent training, mental health resources, and connection to others who understand. We need our voices heard in the spaces where decisions are made. Because no one knows our journey better than we do.

When we lift each other up and advocate for the support we need, we're not being selfish—we're building stronger families and healthier futures.

You're not alone, and your needs are just as important!

Susan



Who we Are ... What we Do!

Susan Riehn

Executive Director

Cynthia Brown

Bookkeeper

Wallace Johnson

Education Support Specialist

Myllinda Elliott

Program Manager, LaCAN Leader & Senior Education Support Specialist

Beryl Cook

Education Support Specialist

Davelyn Patrick

Community Resource Specialist

China Guillory

Early Steps COS

Carla Chenier

ImCA DD

Facilitator

Nicole Jones

I&R/Clerical

Assistant

Like Us On Facebook
Want to keep up to date with
FHF of SWLA?

Like our Facebook page!!
You will receive event information and other bulletins about what is going on in the SWLA region!

www.facebook.com/fhfswla/

What Is Cutting and What Are the Warning Signs?

Non-suicidal self-injury—often referred to as self-harm—involves any act of intentionally injuring or causing harm to oneself. While self-harm can take on various forms, Mental Health America reports that 70–90% of people who self-harm chooses cutting as their preferred method. Self-harm is not a mental health disorder but rather a symptom of an underlying issue(s).

What Are the Signs of Cutting?

What is cutting? Self-harm can be scary, but it is treatable. Learning to recognize the signs of cutting can be challenging. Though they get a temporary sense of relief from the act of cutting, most people understand that it is an unhealthy behavior and go to great lengths to cover it up.

If you suspect someone you know is cutting, look for these common signs:

- Symptoms of depression
- A decline in daily functioning
- Inability to maintain stable relationships
- Expression of feelings of low self-worth, hopelessness, or helplessness
- Keeping sharp objects on hand
- Frequent reports of accidental injuries
- Wearing long pants and long sleeves, even in hot weather
- Fresh cuts, scratches, or wounds

Most cutting is done on body parts that can easily be covered by clothing, commonly the arms, thighs, and torso, with objects that are small, common, and easy to hide, such as thumbtacks, paperclips, safety pins, nail files, or razor blades. Many people use their fingernails if other objects are unavailable. Cutting can escalate when the underlying issues worsen or when the individuals need to increase the frequency or intensity of cutting to feel the same relief effects.

Understanding the Causes of Cutting and Self-Injury

Cutting and self-injury are maladaptive coping skills, not suicide attempts. It's hard to figure out what is cutting sometimes. However, according to reports from Mental Health America, individuals who self-injure are ultimately nine times more likely to attempt suicide, highlighting the need for professional self-harm treatment.

Some people only engage in cutting and other self-injury a few times and then stop; however, many others get stuck in a repetitive, long-term pattern of self-injurious behavior. Understanding the causes of cutting and self-injury can help make it less scary, reduce angry feelings, foster compassion, and encourage the need to seek treatment.

The leading causes of cutting and self-injury are poor coping skills and an inability to manage emotions in healthy ways.

Reasons individuals self-harm can include:

- Unresolved or ongoing trauma
- Untreated mental health conditions
- To cope with overwhelming feelings of anger, sadness, or guilt
- Self-punishment for perceived faults
- To express emotions that are too hard to verbalize
- To feel a sense of control over one's life or circumstances
- To reduce emotional numbness
- Releasing emotional pain through physical pain

Whatever the reason for cutting and other self-injury, it is essential for individuals to know that help is available and to understand the potential consequences of not getting help. The relief that comes from cutting is temporary, and the act does not resolve the issues but exacerbates them.

[READ MORE](#)



Ways to help an adult child with depression

Depression can be an isolating experience. However, the support of parents can help an adult child with depression communicate, develop independence, cultivate self-esteem, and seek treatment.

Raising a child means helping create an adult who can manage their own complexities, including health conditions. One of these conditions can be depression.

Depression is a common mental health condition. It causes a loss of hope, ongoing low mood, and reduced interest in activities a person formerly enjoyed.

Adult children with depression may need the support of their parents or caregivers, while also needing the space to manage depression in their own time and on their own terms.

This article provides guidance on navigating this balance.

Promoting independence and self-empowerment

Helping a person feel independent and empowered is a key step in connecting them with the care they need for depression.

People experiencing depression may not accept help at first. They may be feeling hopeless, worthless, and guilty. This may contribute to a belief that they should be able to help themselves but a sense of discouragement that they cannot. Recovery may not feel like reality for them.

However, the following approaches may help an adult child feel supported, seen, and treatable, as well as provide a sense of control over their own treatment journey:

- **Affirm support:** Let them know they have a support system and a safe place to talk about how they are feeling. Ask them what would help, without assuming what they may need, before they answer.
- **Spend time with them:** Touch base about their feelings in a place with as few distractions as possible and without forcing them to socialize. Keep in mind that oftentimes, listening to them can be more important than offering advice.
- **Be patient:** A person with depression may find it difficult to acknowledge a problem, find asking for help difficult, or repeat themselves. Demonstrate that they have long-term support by showing patience.
- **Support their self-care measures:** Ensure that they regularly eat healthy food and stay hydrated. Encourage them to get outside, and engage in physical activity with them. Take part in fun activities that reduce the chance of alcohol or drug use. It may even help to work out a timetable or routine with them.
- **Encourage them to seek treatment:** Reassurance that they have a medical condition and can recover may help them realize that they can manage their treatment journey and pursue help when they are ready.

To read more on depression:



How to Motivate People with Disabilities

Motivation is a universal driving force that propels individuals to pursue their dreams, overcome challenges, and achieve their goals. Disabled individuals, like everyone else, possess unique aspirations and talents, but they may encounter additional obstacles that can sometimes hinder their motivation.

However, with the right support, encouragement, and understanding, we can empower disabled individuals to unlock their full potential and stay motivated on their journey towards success. In this article, we will explore various strategies and approaches to motivate disabled people effectively.

Be Supportive and Encouraging

Supporting and encouraging a disabled person is fundamental to motivating them. Expressing unwavering belief in their abilities can have a profound impact on their self-esteem and determination to achieve their goals. When individuals with disabilities feel supported, they are more likely to confront challenges with resilience and confidence, propelling them towards their aspirations.

This support can take various forms, including offering words of encouragement, actively listening to their concerns, and being there during both triumphs and setbacks. It means providing a safe and nurturing environment where they feel valued and understood.



Moreover, demonstrating faith in their abilities helps counteract the doubts and uncertainties that can arise when pursuing goals, especially in the face of disability-related challenges. This belief in their potential serves as a powerful motivator, inspiring them to push beyond limitations and strive for success.

Help Set Realistic Goals

Realistic goal-setting is an essential step in motivating a disabled person. It involves breaking down larger objectives into smaller, manageable steps. This approach provides a clear roadmap for achieving success, mitigating feelings of overwhelm, and maintaining motivation throughout the journey.

By setting achievable milestones, individuals with disabilities can see tangible progress and track their accomplishments along the way. This not only boosts their confidence but also reinforces their belief in their ability to overcome challenges.

Breaking down goals into smaller steps allows for a more focused approach, making it easier to tackle specific tasks and measure progress effectively. It prevents the discouragement that can arise when facing seemingly insurmountable objectives.

Additionally, this method encourages a sense of control and agency over one's life, fostering a positive outlook. Each completed step becomes a victory, driving motivation to reach the next milestone and ultimately achieve their larger goals. Overall, helping set realistic goals is a key strategy in empowering disabled individuals to stay motivated and pursue their aspirations with determination.

Provide Necessary Resources

Ensuring access to essential resources is a critical factor in motivating disabled individuals.

These resources encompass a wide range of supports, including assistive devices, transportation services, personal care assistance, and more. They play a pivotal role in breaking down barriers that may hinder individuals from pursuing their goals effectively.

For instance, assistive devices like wheelchairs, communication aids, or adaptive technologies can enhance independence and enable participation in various activities. Transportation services offer the freedom to engage with the community, attend appointments, or access educational and employment opportunities. Personal care assistance provides essential support with daily activities, promoting autonomy and reducing reliance on others.

Celebrate Successes

When successes are celebrated, it reinforces the idea that progress is attainable. It instills confidence and a sense of pride in one's abilities. Moreover, celebrating achievements cultivates a positive mindset, encouraging individuals to maintain their motivation and continue striving toward their goals.



Small victories should not be underestimated, as they often serve as building blocks for more significant achievements. Each step forward, regardless of its size, represents progress and a commitment to personal growth. By celebrating these milestones, disabled individuals receive validation for their efforts and are inspired to persevere.

Furthermore, celebrations create a supportive and encouraging environment that fuels motivation. They remind individuals that their journey is meaningful and that their hard work is recognized and valued by those around them. Ultimately, celebrating successes is a cornerstone of sustaining motivation and propelling individuals toward future accomplishments.

Connect with Inspirational Peers

Connecting with inspirational peers who have disabilities and have successfully achieved their goals can be an invaluable source of motivation. These interactions go beyond just camaraderie; they provide a profound sense of inspiration, support, and a strong feeling of belonging to a community of like-minded individuals.

Inspirational peers serve as living proof that success is attainable, even in the face of adversity. Their stories and achievements demonstrate that disabilities do not define one's capabilities or limit their potential. These connections offer real-world examples of triumph over challenges, instilling hope and motivation in others.

Moreover, these interactions foster a sense of shared experience and understanding that can be hard to find elsewhere. Being part of a community of individuals who have faced similar obstacles creates a supportive network where individuals can exchange advice, encouragement, and strategies for overcoming barriers.

READ MORE >>

IRS Raises ABLE Account Deposit Limit by Michelle Diamant

Starting this month, individuals with disabilities can accrue more money than ever before in a special type of account that allows people to save without jeopardizing access to Medicaid and other government benefits.

Contributions to ABLE accounts can total up to \$19,000 for 2025. That's an increase from \$18,000 last year.

The change comes after the Internal Revenue Service raised the federal gift tax limit. Since the cap on annual deposits for ABLE accounts is tied to that figure, it will grow too.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

ABLE accounts were established under a federal law a decade ago, offering people with disabilities the opportunity to save up to \$100,000 without sacrificing eligibility for Social Security and other government benefits. Medicaid can be retained no matter how much is in the accounts.

Money saved in the accounts can be used to pay for qualified disability expenses including education, health care, transportation and housing. Interest earned is tax-free.

While annual ABLE account deposits are typically maxed at the gift tax limit, there is one exception. Individuals with disabilities who are employed can save some of their earnings so long as they do not contribute to a retirement plan and meet other requirements.

Workers with disabilities living in the 48 contiguous states are allowed to save up to \$15,060 in earnings in ABLE accounts above and beyond the gift tax limit for this year, according to Kathy Brannigan with the ABLE National Resource Center. That figure rises to \$18,810 for Alaska residents and \$17,310 for those in Hawaii.

There are programs offering ABLE accounts in 47 states, nearly all of which are open to individuals nationwide with a disability that onset before the age of 26.

Next year, eligibility for ABLE accounts will expand to include anyone with a disability that onset prior to age 46, a change that's expected to open up the program to an estimated 6 million additional people, Brannigan said.

As of the end of September, there were 187,210 ABLE accounts open with \$2.189 billion in assets, according to ISS Market Intelligence.

LEARN MORE →



FHF will closed,
Thursday, June 19,
2025 to celebrate
Juneteenth Day

Legislative
session
begins
April 14,
2025



FHF will closed,
Monday, May 26, 2025
to celebrate Memorial
Day



Allen Parish

April 14-18, 2025

Beauregard Parish

April 18-25, 2025

Calcasieu Parish

April 18-25, 2025

Cameron Parish

April 21-24, 2025

Jeff Davis Parish

April 21-25, 2025

Hurricane Season 2025

The 2025 Atlantic hurricane season is the next Atlantic hurricane season in the Northern Hemisphere. The season officially begins on **June 1**, 2025, and will end on **November 30**, 2025. These dates, adopted by convention, historically describe the period in each year when most subtropical or tropical cyclogenesis occurs in the Atlantic Ocean (over 97%). The National Hurricane Center (NHC) will begin issuing regular Tropical Weather Outlooks on May 15, 2025, about two weeks prior to the start of the season.

The 2025 season, is predicting an average season with fifteen named storms, seven hurricanes, and three major hurricanes, but noted that the forecast had higher than normal uncertainty due to environmental factors.

Storm Names

The following list of names will be used for named storms that form in the North Atlantic in 2025. This is the same list used in the 2019 season, with the exception of Dexter, which replaced Dorian.



DON'T JUDGE A
DISABILITY
BY ITS
VISIBILITY





FHF will be closed
April 18, 2025 for
Good Friday



Need a speaker for your civic group or organization meeting???
FHF would love to share who we are and what we do with you, give us a call to set up a time!!

Families Helping Families mission is to enable and empower individuals with disabilities and their families by providing information, referral, education, training, peer support and advocacy skills.

Families Helping Families vision is that all individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to attend school, live, work and play in their own community.



For more information:
contact Families Helping Families
of Southwest Louisiana
337-436-2570 • 1-800-894-6558
info@fhfswla.org • www.fhfswla.org





Early Steps would like to invite you to participate in the State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) and the Regional Interagency Coordinating Council (RICC) to discuss early intervention strategies for the Louisiana and the Southwest Louisiana Region. All family members are invited to attend, including providers, and other early intervention personnel. Our mission is to:

Provide a way to participate in the **SICC** and **RICC** to represent regional issues.

SICC will be held on:

Thursday, April 10, 2025

1:00p-3:00p

Claiborne Building in Louisiana Purchase Room 1-100
1201 N Third Street, Baton Rouge, LA.

RICC will be held on:

Thursday, April 24, 2025

1:30p-3:30p via Zoom

For more info or to RSVP contact China Guillory at (337) 436-2570 or email cfguillory@fhfswla.org



The Fortify Homes Program

When disasters strike, many in our disabilities community find themselves in need of assistance with repairs. In an effort to minimize the damages created by nature, homeowners are opting to be proactive by fortifying their roofs through the Fortify Homes Program.

The LFHP provides grants of up to \$10,000 for homeowners to upgrade their roofs to standards set by the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety.

What is the FORTIFIED Roof standard?

The wind mitigation standard adopted by the LFHP is known as the FORTIFIED™ Roof standard. Based on decades of research by the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS) FORTIFIED is a voluntary construction and re-roofing program designed to strengthen homes against specific types of severe weather such as high winds, hail, hurricanes, and even tornados.

More information about the FORTIFIED™ Roof standard is available at www.fortifiedhome.org.

EARLYSTEPS WEBINARS



EarlySteps Family Orientation Webinar

May 8, 2025
11:00 am - 12:30 pm

As a parent of a child who has received EarlySteps services, China Guillory would like to invite you to an EarlySteps family orientation webinar to help you and your child get the most out of your experience from the EarlySteps services provided. These topics and more will be covered:

- What is EarlySteps?
- What are my responsibilities?
- What are my rights as a parent?
- What is an IFSP?

Link to Register:
https://tinyurl.com/ES_F05825R

earlySteps
Louisiana's early intervention system

For More Information call China at:
(337) 436-2570 ♦ 1-800-894-6558
info@fhfswla.org

EarlySteps Transition Webinar

May 8, 2025
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm

Join us to get more
Information about
EarlySteps Transition!

China Guillory, Community Outreach Specialist, will walk you through the process of Transition from EarlySteps and Mylinda Elliott, Education Support Specialist, will discuss Transition for 3 year olds.

Link to Register:
https://tinyurl.com/EST_5825R





Louisiana Department of Health launches pilot program to streamline ER utilization

In partnership with Acadian Health, the Louisiana Department of Health's Medicaid program announces an emergency room (ER) utilization reduction pilot program launching this month across the 12 parishes comprising Region 4 (Acadiana) and Region 5 (Southwest Louisiana). The six-month program minimizes unnecessary ambulance calls and ER visits while ensuring access and quality care for the state's most vulnerable health population.

Recent data gathered by LDH's Bureau of Health Services Financing shows that approximately 20% of the state's Medicaid patients visit local emergency rooms on average 17 times per year, often for non-life-threatening situations or due to social factors, such as a lack of transportation.

The pilot program extends medical services from LDH's six Medicaid managed care organizations (MCOs) to patient residences via urgent mobile care provided by Acadian Health, a Lafayette-based provider of in-home healthcare services. It treats sick but stable Medicaid patients at home, allowing providers to address non-medical drivers of health and reducing emergency room costs and crowding.

Effective February 10, 2025, Acadian Health will provide mobile urgent treatment for an array of non-life-threatening medical conditions, including sickle cell disease and other chronic diseases. Services will be provided daily from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. for patients ages 13 and older.

Acadian Health will be delivering a two-path program:

1. **Acute Care at Home** is an on-demand service for patients who require same-day care within one hour. It serves as alternative care for non-traumatic hospitalizations for sick but stable patients who would otherwise seek care at the ER.
2. **Clinic at Home** is a proactive visit scheduled in advance, usually 24 hours. This allows providers to extend specialty practice into patients' homes, offering treatment at home and the ability to address non-medical drivers of health.

Acadian Health's services include assessment, treatment and administration of medication. The program collaborates with primary care providers and area hospitals to extend medical practice into a patient's home.

Patients must be referred to the program by their provider, hospital or managed care organization.

For more information, such as a full listing of services provided, parishes served and reimbursable procedure codes, visit ldh.la.gov/healthathome.



THE GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY
COUNCIL ON DISABILITY AFFAIRS
& SPLIT SECOND FOUNDATION

Present

Disability Awareness Day

at the Capitol

June 2, 2025

LOUISIANA STATE CAPITOL | 900 N THIRD STREET, BATON ROUGE, LA 70802

SPLIT SECOND
FOUNDATION



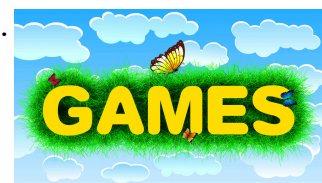
GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COUNCIL
ON DISABILITY AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF GOV. JEFF LANDRY

Brain-Building Through Play: Activities for Infants, Toddlers, and Children

From infancy on, play is an important part of a child's life. For babies and toddlers, simple, playful interactions with adults help develop sturdy brain architecture, the foundations of lifelong health, and the building blocks of resilience. Through games and playful activities, children can practice and strengthen important executive function skills that will help them throughout their lives, including learning to focus their attention, strengthening their working memory, and developing basic self-control. The following handout series, developed with support from the LEGO Foundation, provides suggestions games and play-based activities based on a child's age. The activities for younger children are designed for adults to engage in with children. Activities for later ages allow the adults to step back, enabling children's independence to blossom as they transition to playing more often with peers.



let's play



2025 Youth Leadership Forum Recruiting Delegates

YLF is currently recruiting delegates for its four-day program this summer. The program will be held July 10 – 13, 2025 at the Louisiana State University at Eunice campus. All speakers are peer mentors with disabilities. In addition to learning about advocacy and leadership, delegates will have the opportunity to make like-minded friends and build community. This program gives delegates the skills needed to become future leaders!

Lodging, accommodations, and meals will be provided at no cost. There is a staff to camper ratio of 1:1, as well as, two RNs who will be onsite 24/7 during the program.

Delegates/Campers

- Are you in the 10th, 11th or 12th grade and have a disability?
- Are you interested in learning about the history and culture of the disability community?
- Do you believe your voice can influence policy and make positive changes for people with disabilities?
- Will you commit to attending this summer program July 10 – 13th at the Louisiana State University in Eunice?

If you answered yes to these questions, please click [HERE](#) to apply!

For more information or assistance with applying, please contact Program Coordinator, Lillian DeJean via email at ldejean@fhfacadiana.org or call (337) 205-2504.

Kidz Bop Introduces 12-Year-Old Deaf Performer Savvy in Debut of 'Sign + Dance Along' Videos By [Angela Andaloro](#)

Kidz Bop teamed up with ASL professionals and deaf performer Savvy, 12, to make some of their biggest hits accessible to the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

[Kidz Bop](#) is launching an exciting new video series on their YouTube channel that makes their musical family just a little bit bigger.

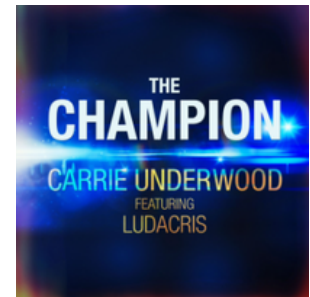
Their latest video series, the Sign + Dance Along series, allows kids to sing, dance, and sign along with their favorite Kidz Bop songs. Working with a Director of [Artistic Sign Language](#) to translate the songs — which include popular tracks like "[We Don't Talk About Bruno](#)" and "[Dance Monkey](#)" — Kidz Bop developed American Sign Language (ASL) lyrics and deaf-friendly choreography for their songs, which they will continue to roll out as part of their commitment to making their content more accessible.

The series also introduces the newest Kidz Bop kid, Savvy, a deaf performer who stars alongside other Kidz Bop talent in the videos. It's just the beginning for the 12-year-old, who will also appear in a slate of picture-in-picture content, where she'll appear in the corner of music videos, using ASL to perform hit songs like "[Meet Me At Our Spot](#)."

"As a KIDZ BOP Kid, I feel proud to be able to make a difference in the lives of deaf children by sharing my passion for music with them," Savvy tells PEOPLE. "My goal is to show them how beautiful music is, regardless of whether or not you can hear it. You just have to feel it in your heart."

Savvy is no stranger to performing, previously having a video of her signing along to [Carrie Underwood](#)'s "The Champion" go viral and get attention from the country star.

"I got to meet her, and perform her song with her. That made me love performing even more!" says Savvy.



By bringing signing into the Kidz Bop world, Savvy is excited to share her love of music and show how people who are deaf can still be passionate about music and dance.

"Whenever I sign, I feel happy knowing that I'm sharing the love that I have for music with people around me, and they enjoy the music as much as I do," she says. "I would like to do that for the deaf community. I want to inspire and show everyone that deaf people can dance and they can sign music."

Her passion for language comes close to her passion for music. "I am learning five new languages right now — French Sign Language, and Thai, Hebrew, French, and Spanish." Savvy is hopeful that the videos will help children and their families learn more about the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

"My favorite thing about this series is that it shows everyone that deaf and hard-of-hearing people can dance and sign at the same time, and that both sign language and dance are both forms of movement and expression," she shares.

For More info Follow the Music:



SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS AND SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI) PAYMENTS FOR CHILDREN

A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS TOOLKIT

The Social Security Benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Payments for Children Toolkit is prepared specifically for educators, teachers, and counselors within the school system. It provides an overview of the types of benefits students may be eligible for. We want to ensure that educators know about requirements and evidence needed to determine if a child is eligible for benefits under the SSI and Retirement, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (RSDI) programs.



Professional Toolkit



FINANCIAL HELP FROM SOCIAL SECURITY MAY BE AVAILABLE FOR STUDENTS

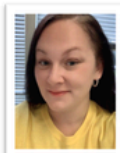
We want to tell you about payments that may be available to your child. Your child could be eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) if they have a disability, and your family has limited income and resources. Your child could also receive Social Security benefits if they have a parent who receives retirement or disability benefits or who has died. We believe every student should have the resources they need to succeed in life. If you're interested in learning more about these programs and how to apply, please visit [Parents and Guardians | SSA](#). You can also reach out to our school for more information.

2025 Easter Stop & Hop





LaCAN (Louisiana Council's Advocacy Network) furthers the LaDDCouncil's mission by advocating for policies and systems that support inclusion everywhere people learn, work, live, and play.



Christina M.
R1/10



April H.
R2



Julie S.
R3



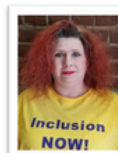
Kristie C.
R4



Mylinda E.
R5



Kristen R.
R6



Mimi W.
R7



Konstance C.
R8



Angel M.
R9

LaCAN Leaders are available to provide additional information and support in your advocacy efforts for systems change.

What We Do

Legislative Roundtables

Information & Action Alerts

Legislative Visits

Yellow Shirt Days

CONNECTION – become a part of a regional team of advocates.

INFORMATION – receive current information on proposed policy changes and how those changes may affect you and others.

TRAINING – learn skills to effectively advocate for systems change.

SUPPORT – receive assistance from a regional LaCAN Leader who will link you with your policymakers and support your advocacy efforts.

LaCAN members participate in various advocacy activities throughout the year. Their efforts have resulted in major accomplishments that have improved the lives of individuals with disabilities. There are plenty of opportunities to get involved. Your level of activity is **totally up to you**.

Linking lawmakers, individuals with disabilities, and family members to make positive change in systems serving people with disabilities.



Share Your Story

Your stories inspire us and help others understand the impact of our services. If our organization has supported you or your family, we'd love to hear about your experience!

Share Your Story in Three Simple Ways:

1. Email - Write your testimonial and send it to us at info@fhfswla.org. Feel free to include details about how we helped and the difference it made for you or your loved one.
2. Video (Self-Recorded) - Create a short video (3 minutes or less) sharing your experience and email it to info@fhfswla.org. A heartfelt message straight from you helps us connect with others even more!
3. Video (Recorded at Our Office) Prefer to record your story with our support? Come to our office, and we'll help you record your video. Contact maelliott@fhfswla.org or call 225-216-7474 to schedule a time.

Your story may be featured on our website, social media, or other materials to inspire and inform families like yours.

Thank you for being part of our community—families helping families is what we do and who we are.

Have Questions?

Reach out to maelliott@fhfswla.org, and we'll be happy to assist.

We look forward to hearing from you!



May

What is the theme for Mental Health Month 2025?

We are thrilled to share Mental Health America's
2025 theme:

“Turn Awareness into Action.”

This theme celebrates the progress we've made
in recognizing the importance of mental health
– and challenges us to turn understanding into
meaningful steps toward change.

The Power of Storytelling and Why it Matters Now More Than Ever

By Jennifer McLelland

“...There are two basic modes for advocacy: fighting against budget cuts that will make things worse and fighting for policy changes that will make things better. We need to keep telling our stories and with more urgency because the stakes are higher. When I talk to families of kids who have complex medical needs who are new to advocacy, I explain that they’ve actually been doing advocacy all along. Making the system work – even just for one child – is advocacy. Talking about how your family figures out a way to cut through all the red tape and live a life of joy is advocacy. Now, they just need to scale it up.

Tips for telling your family’s story:

Start small. Talk to your family and friends about what MediCal does for your child.

Keep it simple. Even though the paperwork can get complicated, the most important thing that MediCal does is make it possible for disabled kids to live their best lives.

Talk to friendly faces. I started out with public speaking in my church and later with interfaith groups, because that’s where I felt comfortable.

Talk to the other side. Voters on both sides of the aisle know that MediCal is important for disabled kids. We need to make sure legislators know this.

Build community. At the state level, Health Access California is gathering stories. The Arc, an advocacy group for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, has a storytelling toolkit with tips on how to tell your story. Little Lobbyists is also gathering stories from families with medically complex children.”

To read the article in its’ entirety, please visit



This article was written for California Health Report in response to possible changes to services and programs for children and youth with special healthcare needs and disabilities on a federal level. While this article references MediCal (Medicaid in Louisiana) in some places the same advocacy techniques can be used.

Device May Be Headed To Market That Could Help Diagnose Autism Earlier

Source: <https://www.disabilityscoop.com>

With its first foray into medical devices, Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories is hoping to help children with autism spectrum disorder get diagnosed and into care earlier in life.

The Pullman-based manufacturer announced recently that it's moving forward with efforts to bring a handheld autism medical technology device to clinics across the country, after acquiring in 2024 the intellectual property and hiring the researcher who developed it at Washington State University Spokane.

While yet to receive federal approval, the device can detect atypical reactions to light in a child's pupils, which research has shown to be an indicator of autism.

Autism is a developmental disability that affects about 1 in 36 children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Although there are differences on a spectrum, autism often causes problems with social communication and interaction, and restricted or repetitive behaviors or interests.

It does not provide a clear-cut diagnosis, but the data the device gathers through analyzing pupil activity would be an invaluable tool in the screening process for clinicians, said Georgina Lynch, the researcher who developed a prototype while an associate professor at the WSU Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine.

Schweitzer Engineering purchased the technology in 2024 and hired Lynch to oversee the medical devices team responsible for its development.

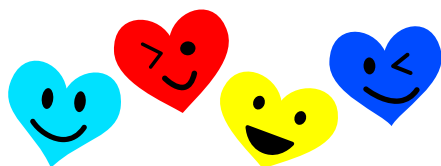
"We very much believe that there is a need for objective, physical markers that are associated with autism to help guide the screening process," Lynch said.

Sampling at a rate of 80 frames per second, the 6-inch-wide device takes pictures of the eye as it responds to light, Lynch said.

She explained her research, as well as that of peers at other institutions, has shown that the pupillary light reflex provides a sort of window into a child's brain activity. The efficiency of the nerves for the light reflex indirectly allows clinicians to measure the efficiency of the cranial nerves in the brain stem.

"It's more than just looking at the eye and the response to light," Lynch said. "It's more about understanding what happens in the brainstem and autism that is significantly different from typical development, and that's a new understanding."

To continue reading:





History Fact #1: Autism Awareness Month

Started in April 1970. Autism Awareness Month was founded in April 1970 by Bernard Rimland, Ph. D., a psychologist and autism researcher. He chose the month of April to coincide with his son's birthday, as well as the start of spring—a time for new beginnings.



Allen Parish

Thursday, May 22, 2025

Beauregard Parish

Thursday, May 22, 2025

Calcasieu Parish

Wednesday, May 21, 2025

Cameron Parish

Thursday, May 22, 2025

Jeff Davis Parish

Thursday, May 22, 2025

Cinemark Summer Movie Clubhouse!

Summer is almost here and we're ready to celebrate with a spectacular movie program created for kids and their parents alike! Our Summer Movie Clubhouse for kids runs for ten weeks this summer, from **June 9 to August 14**, with showtimes every Wednesday. (Some theaters may also have Monday and/or Thursday showtimes.) **Tickets are only \$1.75**, with discounts for snacks during each showtime. We'll have something for every young movie lover (and their parents).

Movies:

Despicable Me 4 - June 9-12

Sonic the Hedgehog 3 - June 16-19

Kung Fu Panda 4 - June 23-26

IF - June 30-July 3

The Wild Robot - July 7-10

Transformers One - July 14-18

The Garfield Movie - July 21-24

Dog Man - July 28-31

The Lego Batman Movie - August 4-7

Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse -
August 11-14



live
your
dream.

CALCASIEU EARLY CHILDHOOD COORDINATED ENROLLMENT



HEADSTART ROUND UP - 3 YEAR OLDS

Guidelines:

- Must be three (3) years old on or before September 30,
- Child's certified birth certificate
- Child's social security card
- Child's up-to-date immunization record
- Proof of income
 - Income Tax Form (1040), SSI Income, Unemployment Benefits, TANF, Child Support
- Court orders or legal documentation of guardianship
- Calcasieu students with disabilities are eligible for services
- Must adhere to attendance guidelines

Eligibility criteria apply providing guidelines are met.

By law, Calcasieu Parish School Board Head Start must provide services to families with a family income at or below the federal poverty guidelines including homeless and/or foster care.

Students with disabilities:

Students with an IFSP and/or IEP are accepted in the program.

Transportation Opportunities:

If you are in need of support with transporting your child to and from school, contact Calcasieu Transit at (337)217-4040.

PRE-K ROUND UP - 4 YEAR OLDS

Guidelines:

- Must be four (4) years old on or before September 30,
- Child's certified birth certificate
- Child's social security card
- Child's up-to-date immunization record
- Family's income must be 200% below the federal poverty guidelines
- Must provide verification of income
 - Two (2) consecutive check stubs for each parent/caregiver in the household
 - SNAP or SSI documentation with child's name
 - foster care agreement
- Court orders or legal documentation of guardianship
- Must provide proof of address
 - i.e. current electricity statement
- Must adhere to attendance guidelines
- **Out of Zone Permits are not required**
 - Priority is given to students who live within the school's zone.

Transportation:

Refer to the CPSB website -www.cpsb.org- for specific guidelines regarding transportation information as well as before/after school enrichment.

CPSB SCHOOLS & CHARTER SCHOOLS

To learn more about Calcasieu Network Early Childhood programs, please visit www.cpsb.org.



To learn more about Early Childhood Programs, please visit www.louisianaschools.com or scan the QR Code.

OFFICE INFORMATION

Monday - Friday | 8 AM to 3 PM

J.F. Kennedy ELC - Early Childhood Department
2001 Russell Street, Lake Charles, LA, 70615
(337)217-4210 ext. 2802

Jake Drost Head Start
1100 N. Crocker Street, Sulphur, LA, 70663
(337)217-4510 ext. 1174

LA GATOR Scholarship Program

The Louisiana Giving All True Opportunity to Rise (LA GATOR) Scholarship Program was signed into law by Governor Jeff Landry June 19, 2024. Enacted by the 2024 Louisiana legislature (Act 1), this new program will for the first time ever provide education scholarship accounts (ESAs) to Louisiana families. These scholarships provide parents with an account that allows them to customize their child's education. The scholarship accounts can be used for school tuition and fees, tutoring, educational therapies, textbooks and curricula, dual enrollment courses, and uniforms.

The LDOE will accept online student applications

March 1 to April 15, 2025, for the 2025-2026 school year. Continue to visit our website for the latest updates or sign-up for our LA GATOR email list.





YOU'RE IN FOR A TREAT PRE-K LIFE IS SWEET

THE CPSB EARLY CHILDHOOD DEPARTMENT HOSTS THIS EVENT ANNUALLY TO KICK OFF REGISTRATION FOR PRE-K AND HEAD START IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, CHARTER SCHOOLS, HEAD START PROGRAMS, AND CHILD CARES. PARENTS DESIRING TO REGISTER THEIR CHILDREN FOR 2025-2026 SCHOOL YEAR WILL BE IN ATTENDANCE.

MAY 3, 2025
900 LAKESHORE DRIVE
LAKE CHARLES, LA 70601
9 A.M. - 12 P.M.

Social Security Administration Resumes Treasury Offset Program Collections After COVID-19 Suspension

The Social Security Administration (SSA) today announced the immediate resumption of debt collection activities through the Treasury Offset Program (TOP) for debts accrued prior to March 2020. This decision comes after a suspension of collections due to the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Treasury Offset Program, administered by the Department of the Treasury's Bureau of Fiscal Service,

To continue reading [**CLICK HERE**](#)

The City of Lake Charles Summer Camp



The City of Lake Charles Recreation and Parks Department will be accepting summer camp registration from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Purple Heart Recreation Center, 4305 Avenue H in Lake Charles. Registration is free, open to children age six to twelve, and available on a first come, first serve basis.

Each of the seven community center-based summer camps are scheduled to begin on Mon., June 5 and run for eight weeks—concluding on Fri., July 28.

Summer Camp will provide fun and educational field trip experiences including visits to City Parks, a water park, local museums, and other area attractions. Participants will become oriented to what is available for youth in the community and experience hands-on activities such as crafts, bowling, skating, games and much more.

Site locations include Bellard Community Center, 2808 Hillcrest Drive; Columbus Circle Community Center, 3520 Greinwich Boulevard; College Oaks Community Center, 3518 Ernest Street; Donald Ray Stevens Center (Goosport), 1619 Cessford Street;

Henry Heights Community Center, 801 E. School Street;

Mike D. Lanza Community Center, 609 Sycamore Street; and

Wiley B. McMillan Community Center, 343 Goos Street.



Summer Camp hours are 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily. To register, please bring a copy of your child's birth certificate. This is a mandatory requirement, and no incomplete registration packets will be accepted. For more information, call 491-1280.

Families Supporting Members with Autistic Tendencies

Artcile By: Mylinda Elliot

Parenting is a journey filled with learning, adapting, and growing alongside your child. When raising a child with autistic tendencies, that journey often requires a deeper understanding of how their brain works and how to create a place where they can thrive.

Autistic tendencies may come from medical conditions, learning disabilities, or neurological differences such as ADHD, dyslexia, or Down syndrome. Autistic tendencies affects how individuals process information, regulate emotions, and interact with their environment.

A crucial aspect of supporting individuals with autistic tendencies is recognizing that society is mostly designed for typical people. As a result, individuals with autistic tendencies often must mask—suppressing behaviors that help them self-regulate to fit societal norms. Home should be a place where they can be themselves, free from the pressure of conforming.

For many families, the home is a sanctuary, a space that should be made to meet the needs of the family. In a household with people with autistic tendencies, this may look a little different from a traditional home.

- Fidget toys might be readily available throughout the house for sensory regulation.
- A weighted blanket is accessible for anyone who needs deep pressure input to feel calm.
- Stimming is ignored

For typical parents raising children with autistic tendencies one of the keys may be watching your children for certain things. Watching how your child interacts with their environment can help you make small, meaningful changes that create a more accommodating and supportive space.

Three Practical Strategies for Supporting People with Autistic Tendencies

1. Helping with Object Permanence Problems

Object permanence—the idea that something no longer exists when it’s out of sight—can be a significant problem for individuals with ADHD. This can lead to forgetting appointments, medications, or even personal stuff.

Some effective ways to manage this include:

Keeping important items visible, like placing medication on a desk as a visual reminder. Putting shoes in a single, easy-to-find spot rather than storing them in separate places. Using open storage or labeled bins to prevent items from being forgotten in drawers or cabinets. These simple changes can prevent frustration and help reduce the likelihood of misplaced items or overlooked tasks.

2. What is Body Doubling and How Can It Help

Body doubling is a technique where having another person present—even virtually—helps improve focus and motivation. This can be particularly helpful for tasks that feel overwhelming or tedious.

Some ways to incorporate body doubling into daily life include:

- Talking to a friend on the phone while doing household chores.
- Working by a coworker, either in person or through a virtual coworking session.
- Joining online body doubling groups, like Work Buddies on TikTok or Discord, where participants check in, set timers, and remind each other to take breaks.
- For children, having a parent or sibling nearby while they do homework, play, or complete tasks can offer the same benefits.

This method requires minimal effort yet surprisingly can significantly help productivity and reduce procrastination.

3. Using Visual Schedules and Checklists

Organization can be challenging for people with autistic tendencies, making visual reminders and structured routines important tools.

·A small checklist near a backpack station is a morning routine reminder.

- A wall calendar in a high-traffic area keeps upcoming events, appointments, and due dates visible.
- Important papers (such as bills or invitations) are clipped directly onto the calendar as visual prompts.

These tools help reduce the mental load of keeping track of responsibilities and lead to independence and accountability. Even with the best systems in place, things won’t always go as planned.. No strategy is foolproof, and self-compassion is essential.

For parents with autistic tendencies raising children with autistic tendencies, one of the most powerful things you can do is model adaptability. By openly trying new strategies, adjusting when needed, and embracing flexibility, you show your child that there’s no right way to navigate life—only what works best for them.

For typical parents, the key takeaway is understanding that different brains require different approaches. By creating a supportive environment, you reinforce the idea that individuality is normal, valid, and worthy of respect.

No two people with autistic tendencies are exactly alike, so what works for one person may not work for another. The most important thing is to remain open to learning, experimenting, and finding systems that align with your family's unique needs.

Managing Caregiver Burnout: Tips for Self-Care

Being a caregiver to a child with disabilities is a deeply rewarding experience, but it can also be incredibly taxing, both physically and emotionally. As a caregiver, it's easy to lose sight of your own needs while focusing on the needs of your child.

Caregiving can sometimes lead to burnout, a deep sense of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. If you're feeling overwhelmed, know that you're not alone. The good news is that burnout doesn't have to be the end of the road. With some intentional steps, you can care for yourself while continuing to provide the love and support your child needs.



Recognizing the Signs of Caregiver Burnout

It's important to be aware of the signs of burnout so that you can take action early. Some common signs include:

- **Constant exhaustion** – Feeling drained, no matter how much rest you get, is a red flag.
- **Emotional fatigue** – Overwhelming feelings of stress, frustration, or sadness that you can't shake.
- **Increased irritability** – Small challenges may feel like huge obstacles, and you may find yourself snapping at others.
- **Difficulty sleeping or changes in appetite** – Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or changes in eating habits can be a sign that stress is taking its toll.
- **Detachment or guilt** – Feeling disconnected from your child or experiencing guilt when you take time for yourself.

If you're experiencing any of these symptoms, it's essential to take a step back and focus on your own needs.

Self-care isn't selfish—it's necessary for your health and the health of your child.

Self-Care Strategies for Caregivers

Taking care of yourself isn't a luxury; it's a necessity. Here are some practical strategies to help prevent burnout and restore your energy:

1. **Prioritize Rest and Sleep** Caregivers often sacrifice sleep in the name of taking care of their child. However, sleep is essential for your physical and mental health. Try to establish a calming nighttime routine for both you and your child. If possible, ask for help with nighttime caregiving duties so that you can get a full night's rest. Even if your child has special needs that require constant attention, you may be able to trade shifts with a family member or hire a trusted caregiver for support.
2. **Set Realistic Expectations** Perfectionism can be a dangerous trap. As a caregiver, it's easy to feel like you should be doing everything perfectly. However, it's important to recognize that you can't do it all. Set realistic expectations for yourself and your child. Celebrate small victories and be kind to yourself when things don't go as planned.
3. **Seek Support** You don't have to do this alone. Reaching out for support is one of the best things you can do for your well-being. Look for local or online support groups where you can connect with other caregivers who understand your challenges. Having a network of people who can offer advice, empathy, or a listening ear can make all the difference. If you need additional help, consider talking to a therapist who specializes in caregiver burnout.

4. **Schedule Time for Yourself** Caregivers often neglect their own needs in favor of caring for their child. However, taking time for yourself is crucial for maintaining your mental health. Schedule regular breaks, even if they're just 10-15 minutes of quiet time to read, meditate, or enjoy a cup of tea. Engage in hobbies or activities that bring you joy, whether it's painting, gardening, or simply taking a walk.

5. **Maintain Your Physical Health** Caregiver burnout can take a physical toll on your body. To prevent this, make sure you're eating balanced meals, staying hydrated, and incorporating gentle exercise into your routine. Even simple stretches or short walks can help relieve stress and improve your overall health. Taking care of your body will allow you to be a more effective caregiver.

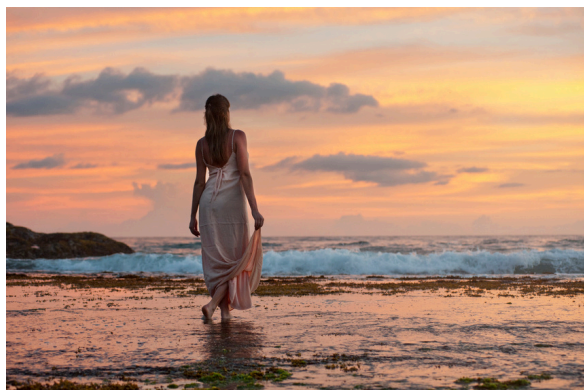
6. **Use Respite Services** Taking a break from caregiving is essential for recharging your energy. Respite care programs offer temporary relief by providing professional caregivers who can take over for a short period, allowing you to rest and focus on other aspects of your life. If formal respite care isn't available in your area, consider asking a family member, friend, or neighbor to step in for a few hours. Many caregivers find that even a few hours of rest can make a significant difference.

7. **Advocate for Your Needs** Don't be afraid to ask for help, whether it's from healthcare providers, school staff, or friends and family. Being open about your stress and emotional needs allows others to step in and offer support. Additionally, you may be able to access financial aid or community programs that can ease some of the burdens of caregiving.

Conclusion

As a caregiver, it's easy to feel like your child's needs come first—always. However, remember that your well-being is just as important. When you take care of yourself, you're better equipped to care for your child. The road to preventing burnout is ongoing, but by making self-care a priority, you'll find it easier to maintain the energy, patience, and strength needed to provide the best care for your child.

You're not alone on this journey, and there are many resources available to help you along the way. Don't hesitate to reach out for support when needed. You are doing an incredible job, and your health and happiness matter.



I have no wings, but I can fly. I
have no eyes, but I can cry.

What am I?

Answer is on
the last page



MORE ESSENTIAL SOCIAL AND LIFE SKILLS FOR ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES WEBINAR

11 AM WED, APRIL 23, 2025

Link to Register:

<https://tinyurl.com/eSocialSkills4-23-25>

This webinar is another installment that will focus on the importance of the continued development of social skills and functional living skills for adolescents and young adults with disabilities.

Guest Speaker:

Lettie K. Goings, M.A., B.C.B.A., L.B.A.
Senior Behavior Analyst
McNeese Autism Program
mcneese.edu/autism

**Please contact Carla Chenier with questions or
for more information.**

337-436-2570 or cmchenier@fhfswla.org



FREE WEBINAR

HIGH SCHOOL YEARS IN TRANSITION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WEBINAR

FRIDAY APRIL 25, 2025 AT 12 PM

Link to Register: <https://tinyurl.com/hst42525>

Join us for this webinar on the transition process from high school to adult life.

Audience: Parents, Caregivers, Self-Advocates, and Professionals of Adults and School-Aged Children/Students



WWW.FHFSWLA.ORG • INFO@FHFSWLA.ORG
(337) 436-2570 • 1-800-894-6558



ALL HAZARDS EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

FOR PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES & THEIR FAMILIES

**Tuesday, May 13, 2025
at 1 PM**

Join us for this interactive webinar that will help prepare you for hazards that might threaten your family and home.

This webinar will be presented by
Bambi Polotzola, M.Ed.
Statewide Independent Living
Council and **Nicole DeJean**, M.Ed.,
NBCT Disability Access Solutions.

Register Today:
<https://tinyurl.com/AllHaz513>

📍 **Families Helping Families of SWLA**

📞 **337-436-2570/800-894-6558**

🌐 **info@fhfswla.org**



Coming Soon!

Introduction to Special Education Webinar

Wednesday, May 14, 2025 from 1 PM to 2 PM

Do you suspect your child could benefit from special education and related services, or is your child newly evaluated? This overview of Special Education and related services will give you a strong foundation on which to build future knowledge. You will learn about the philosophy of special education, the laws, the evaluation process, and some information about the IEP.

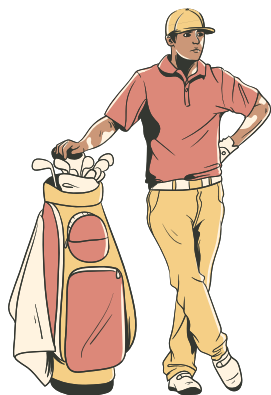
Link to Register: <https://tinyurl.com/IntroSped051425>

Related Services Webinar

Friday, May 23, 2025 from 12 PM to 1 PM

Children with disabilities are entitled to special education and related services. The IEP must contain a statement of the special education, related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the child. Participants will learn several critical elements used to determine what related services a student needs.

Link to Register: <https://tinyurl.com/RelatedSvs052325>



SPONSORS NEEDED

Sponsor levels for all budgets
smriehn@fhfswla.org or 337.436.2570

17TH ANNUAL FORE FOR FAMILIES GOLF TOURNAMENT

All proceeds from this event will be used to provide information, support and education to individuals with disabilities and their families.
Together, we can make a difference!

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025

Mallard Golf Club

2 Person Scramble
1PM Shotgun Start

www.fhfswla.org



**WE NEED YOUR
HELP!!**

**SPONSORS
NEEDED!!**



Invest in Families Helping Families of Southwest Louisiana.

FHFSWLA is a 501 (c)3 nonprofit agency that relies on donations to meet the needs of our agency's mission and vision. By donating to FHFSWLA you are investing in the lives of

people with disabilities and their families. If passion paid, we would be the richest nonprofit in SWLA. Unfortunately, passion alone does not fully support our organization.

Please consider making a contribution so families who are touched by disability can be assured this one of a kind, family directed resource center is always here when they need us.

Contributions can be made to:
Families Helping Families of Southwest Louisiana
P O Box 1627
Lake Charles, LA 70602

FHF is funded in part by a contract from the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council.

**FAMILIES HELPING FAMILIES
IT'S WHO WE ARE!
IT'S WHAT WE DO!**

Families Helping Families of Southwest Louisiana

MAILING ADDRESS: P O BOX 1627, LAKE CHARLES, LA 70602
OFFICE ADDRESS: 324 W. HALE ST., LAKE CHARLES, LA 70601
(337) 436-2570 • 1-800-894-6558 • (337) 436-2578 FAX

EMAIL: INFO@FHFSWLA.ORG

WEBSITE: [HTTPS://WWW.FHFSWLA.ORG](https://WWW.FHFSWLA.ORG)

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/fhfswla>

**Riddle Answer:
A cloud**

Opinions contained herein do not necessarily represent those of the funding source, and no endorsement should be inferred.