



I WANT YOU!

The Family Café
CHANGE AGENT NETWORK
THEY NEED YOU!

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This Newsletter Is A Project Of The Family Café

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The Change Agent Network is a project of The Family Café and offers an opportunity for advocates and change agents to work collaboratively to transform the system by: combining abilities, skills, ideas, and talents; standing together for meaningful system reform measures; taking the lead in our communities and neighborhoods; sharing information to help families become effective players within their communities; developing statewide networks to organize and discuss the issues that are most important to families and persons with disabilities; and creating a united position on critical disability policy issues.



The 23rd Annual Family Café

Friends, we are (mostly) back! We are pleased to report that we will be having an in-person Annual Family Café this year! It will look different however, so it's important that everyone take a moment to understand those differences in order to make a decision about whether or not to attend in person that is in the best interest of their own family.



WWW.FAMILYCAFE.NET

One important thing to know about The 23rd Annual Family Café is that everything that takes place on site will be either livestreamed or recorded and available soon thereafter for viewing. That means that whether you come to Orlando or participate online, you will have access to the same content.

While it is our great hope that by June some of the restrictions in terms of capacity and distancing may be lessened, we do not have the luxury of making that assumption. In other words, we have to plan an event that we can have “today.” As guests of the Hyatt (and Orange County) we will, of course, abide by all the local ordinances and corporate policies, and because our event takes planning, we have to work around the current protocols. That means that the hotel is working at 50% capacity. That applies to the number of hotel rooms available, and the number of people allowed in meeting rooms. So while there are still rooms available for reservation, and The Family Café will have financial assistance rooms to award, there are fewer than in prior years. This is the one component of the event that as conditions improve and restrictions are lessened, we can adjust as June approaches. We will add more rooms if they become available.

Another part of hosting a live conference will have to do with guidelines attendees must follow at the Hyatt. Masks must be worn at all times. We realize this can be a challenge for some families but this policy is non-negotiable. There will be masks available, but the hotel will enforce this requirement.

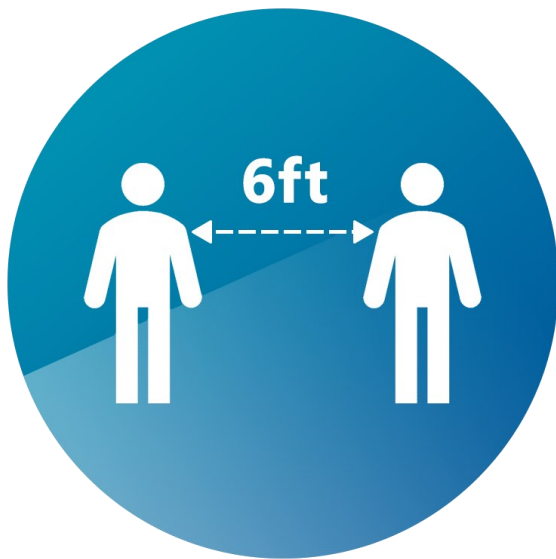
There will also be guidelines in place regarding social distancing, and those will make the usual breakout sessions look a bit different. Over the course of three days, we will have approximately 70 live sessions in rooms that can accommodate large groups, as opposed to the small breakout rooms throughout the hotel where breakouts are usually held. We will still use the Plaza International Ballroom for our keynote speakers and the Governor’s Summit. Breakout sessions will also take place in the adjoining Florida and Orlando Ballrooms. Each of these ballrooms will be separated into three large meeting spaces. In short, rather than dozens of small rooms, there will be seven large rooms in use simultaneously throughout the conference.

Despite the limitations we face in planning this year’s event, it will still feature the educational and informational components you have come to expect from The Family Café. There will, however, be less “frills” for our youngest participants and we want families to take this fact into consideration. We will have to wait for next year for the duck race, book fair, the sensory

room, and arts and crafts. We won't be able to host self-advocate performances in the hallways during breaks either. There will still be an Exhibit Hall, but the vendors spaced apart. While the Exhibit Hall will have fewer vendors than usual, it will still have plenty of important information and materials to assist families and individuals with disabilities.

With all of this in mind, we understand that this may not be the year for everyone. The health and well-being of our extended Family Café family of the utmost importance to us. We will do everything possible to make our time together as safe as we can, but we need you to do your part and attend only if it is safe for you to do so. We strongly suggest that attendees be vaccinated prior to attending, and add a reminder that masks must be worn while in the hotel, outside of your room, at all times.

Despite the logistical challenges, we are excited about the impressive line-up of keynote speakers, the Governor's Summit, and the quality breakout sessions we have assembled. Whether you decide to attend in person or follow our online livestream, you will have the same access to the information and resources you've come to expect at The Annual Family Café. Please do consider your options, and do what makes sense for you. If you're vaccinated, ready to mask up, and craving that face-to-face experience, by all means, join us in Orlando! If you aren't quite ready and feel safer at home, please be a part of our virtual Family Café community. Either way, we look forward to connecting with you in June!





The 2021 Legislative Session is Underway!

With the Legislative Session reaching the halfway point, now begins the important task of budget conversations and negotiations. Earlier in the year, Florida's budget forecast, like every other state budget, looked to be dire. The most recent Revenue Estimating Conference determined the budget shortfall to be a little over \$2 billion. Comparatively speaking, we are in better shape than most. The passage of President Biden's stimulus package is helping a great deal avoid the need to consider much deeper cuts to the State's budget. Despite this much better than expected budget scenario, we should remain vigilant in our advocacy for the budget items that are critical to individuals with disabilities.

Please tune in to our weekly "Let's Talk!" Legislative Conference Call series every Friday at 4 PM ET for weekly updates on what's happening in Tallahassee. During the conference call we will host various speakers, including community leaders, legislative leadership, and local activists to share ideas/comments regarding the agencies and programs funded by the state. Our vision of meaningful family engagement in the legislative process can only be successful with your participation!

Finally, since the legislative session is basically virtual this year, we hope you have been able to tune in to either of the websites for all committee hearings: www.myfloridahouse.gov and www.flsenate.gov.



Don't Forget to Register

The 23rd Annual Family Cafe is set to be held at the Hyatt Regency Orlando on June 11-13, 2021. Registration is open on our website at familycafe.net.

While capacity at the event will be limited, as mentioned previously, we are looking forward to hosting this in-person event along with virtual attendance options. We hope you will consider which option works best for your family and participate.

As always, there is no registration fee for individuals with disabilities and their family members, and limited financial assistance is available to cover the cost of hotel accommodation.

To request financial assistance, make sure to check the appropriate box when you register. All financial assistance is awarded by lottery.

In order to be considered for financial assistance, you must register by April 1st! Make sure to register for Florida's premier disability event at www.familycafe.net!

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