



*The*

**18<sup>th</sup>**



**Annual**



***QUESTIONS & ANSWERS***

***FROM***

***THE 18TH ANNUAL FAMILY CAFÉ***



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## **Welcome to The Family Café Questions & Answers Book for 2016!**

Navigating the service delivery system and finding resources has always been a challenge for persons with disabilities and their families. For over eighteen years, The Family Café has been there to help. Since 1998, our mission has been to provide persons with disabilities and their families with information, training, support and opportunities to network with other families, professionals and public policy makers.

The primary place where that mission has been realized is at our signature event, The Annual Family Café. This year's 18th Annual Family Café attracted an extraordinary 10,632 people. There were a record 233 educational sessions on a wide array of topics. The event included a series of three keynote addresses, with the first from mental health advocate Kevin Hines, the second informing families of new opportunities presented by the ABLE Act, and the third sharing an inspirational message from Paralympian Dorian Willes. The Florida Disabled Outdoors Association hosted an Outdoor Adaptive Sports Demonstration, and the Exhibit Hall featured more than 100 public and private vendors, including several self-advocate owned Micro-Enterprises. The Family Café was also excited to co-host an Assistive Technology Room with our partners from The Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST).

The Family Café was pleased to host Florida's Governor at The Annual Summit on Disabilities. Governor Scott offered insight into his priorities for Florida's disability community. Representatives from various State Agencies were on hand to answer questions about their programs, and sitting Legislators also offered their perspective.

Of course, The Family Café recognizes that no matter how informative The Annual Family Café is, it can't answer every family's questions in three short days. That's why we have always helped families to engage with the agencies that serve them through "Pink Cards." At The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café, attendees shared their questions and comments by filling out Pink Cards. The Family Café in turn obtained written responses from the relevant State Agencies. The end result is **The Family Café Questions & Answers Book**.

This book has been designed as a resource to address the concerns of Floridians with disabilities and their families. Although every situation is unique, *The Family Café Questions & Answers Book* can serve as a quick reference guide and a great starting point for anyone seeking information. If you need to know more than you can find here, we encourage you to contact the relevant state agency, and to make your needs known, and your voice heard!

We hope you will join us for The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café, June 16-18, 2017, at the Hyatt Regency Orlando. Online registration opens on Valentine's Day, Tuesday, February 14<sup>th</sup>. Until then, feed your need for information with *The Family Café Questions & Answers Book*! And remember, we are always available online at FamilyCafe.net, on Facebook at Facebook.com/TheFamilyCafeFL, and on Twitter @TheFamilyCafe!

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# The Family Café

**I already signed up to be a Family Café Delegate, however I would like to become more involved with The Family Café, such as a panel or committee, etc.**

Thanks so much for your spirit of volunteerism! There are a couple more ways that you can become more involved. One way is to become a member of CAN, our Change Agent Network. This membership-based group focuses on policy advocacy. Learn more about CAN at [cannow.org](http://cannow.org). Additionally, you may be interested in serving on The Family Café Planning Committee that puts The Annual Family Café together. If you would like to be part of the group that makes The Annual Family Café happen, send us an email at [info@familycafe.net](mailto:info@familycafe.net).

**Can you add more information for the differently abled to get the services that they need? Great conference just need to increase service for more people with various disabilities. I thought there could be more service offering.**

Thanks for your feedback. The Family Café and its Planning Committee makes a significant effort to bring as many resources as possible to The Annual Family Café, with an emphasis on including as many different types of disabilities as possible. If there is a particular service provider, organization, or type of disability that you feel should be represented, we would encourage you to contact them directly and invite them to attend. You can also send your suggestions to [info@familycafe.net](mailto:info@familycafe.net) and we will reach out to them as well.

**How can we become more involved in helping with this event?**

Thanks for your willingness to help! Each year we solicit volunteers to help on-site through the registration process. To sign up to serve as a room monitor or registration desk volunteer, simply note your availability on the registration form and The Family Café will contact you.

If you are interested in becoming more involved throughout the year, we would encourage you to join CAN, our Change Agent Network. This membership-based group focuses on policy advocacy. Learn more about CAN at [cannow.org](http://cannow.org).

**I think that the sessions should be recorded as there is so much information. Families could purchase the whole conference and have the information needed. Thank you so much for all the hard work. This was my first and I was blessed!**

It's great to hear that you enjoyed The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café! We do record a select number of sessions. Recordings from this year, and previous years, are available in the "Videos and Trainings" section of our website or on our YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYHTfJCM4IjyWaVT7e5ExCA>. Unfortunately we do not have the necessary resources to record every session. If there's a session you missed that piqued your interest, we would encourage you to contact the presenter directly for more information.

**Are there any Family Cafe events in South Florida or something similar? I had such a wonderful time with my son at his art micro enterprise.**

It's great to hear that you had a positive experience at The Annual Family Café! It's our pleasure to include micro-enterprises in our Exhibit Hall to promote the talents and abilities of small business owners with disabilities.

As to your question regarding events in South Florida, The Family Café holds its annual event in Orlando because of its central location and large amount of hotel space. We do not currently have plans to host smaller regional events. For resources in your area we would suggest you contact your District ESE program office or the FDLRS serving your area (<http://www.fdlrs.org/>).

**I feel there needs to be a respite room again. Even if the individuals prepay for this specifically. Or at least offer something to allow the parents or guardians to go to the break out session alone to learn valuable information.**

Thank you for that suggestion. The Family Café Planning Committee is examining the possibility of offering respite care at the event. Should we be able to find room in our budget to provide for the cost and identify a provider, we will make an announcement regarding respite and allow attendees an opportunity to request it well in advance of The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café. Respite care is definitely expensive, and cost was a major consideration in the Planning Committee's discussion of this issue. We will share your suggestion of allowing attendees to purchase respite care with the Planning Committee.



**My husband, my son, and I enjoyed The Family Cafe for the first time this year. As newbies, we seemed very overwhelmed. Is there a way to talk to someone to help with planning an itinerary maybe the weekend before The Family Cafe next year? I'm hoping to bring my Global Intellectual Disability child along with me next year. My son, who has autism did have fun, was a little overwhelmed but so was I. Thank you for all that you do. See you next year.**

Coming to The Annual Family Café for the first time can definitely be an overwhelming experience. One of the best ways to deal with that challenge is to plan out what sessions you will attend and what activities you will participate in ahead of time. That's why we make the program and the smartphone app available several weeks before the event. You can also contact our office before coming to Orlando, or find anyone in a chef coat on-site to help you figure out where to go. We hope to see you again next year!

**Maybe have some people answering questions, this was our first time and we had so many questions and were confused on some things.**

Thanks for that suggestion. The Annual Family Café can definitely be a bit overwhelming. If you need help or have questions, you can find anyone that is wearing a chef coat at the event. That's the official uniform for our staff and Board of Directors. You can also talk to one of the volunteers, who wear Family Café aprons.

**Suggestion. Perhaps a reminder in the book. Not all disabilities are visible and not all people want to tell you what's wrong. Just something to think about.**

Thanks for that suggestion. There is definitely a unique culture around "invisible" disabilities. We attempt to make our event disability friendly, and to account for all types of disabilities, whether they are obvious on first glance or not. Given the fact that most people at The Annual Family Café have disability experience, we would hope that attendees appreciate the fact that one can't tell what someone else is going through just by looking at them.

**How do you go about getting a table set up for the Exhibit Hall for next year's Annual Family Cafe in 2017?**

The Exhibitor Form is available on The Family Café website at [www.familycafe.net](http://www.familycafe.net). And here's a direct link to the Exhibitor Form:  
<http://www.familycafe.net/images/stories/pdf/files/19th-exhib-form.pdf>.

**I would like to know how to “give back” to The Family Cafe. Do you accept donations? If so, are you tax exempt and how to I donate? Thank you!**

Thank you! The Family Café is a 501c3 nonprofit organization and all donations in support of The Family Café are tax deductible. The easiest way to contribute is by visiting our website at [www.familycafe.net](http://www.familycafe.net) and clicking the DONATE button on our homepage. You can also send checks to us by mail to The Family Café, 820 E Park Ave., Suite F-100, Tallahassee, FL 32301.

**Why don't you offer food? I am hungry and the prices at the hotel are too high!**

We recognize that finding affordable dining options can be a challenge. Due to cost, The Family Café is unable to host any meals during the event. That said, we do work with the hotel to create a low-cost menu for our attendees. We're pleased to let you know that the Hyatt Regency, which will host The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café next year, will offer a 20% dining discount. We are also working with them to offer less expensive food for purchase in the event space. As the Hyatt is located on International Drive, there will be many dining options outside the hotel available.

**How do I receive financial assistance? I guess I just missed the lottery. How does it work?**

The Family Café offers financial assistance through a lottery system. Everyone that registers for the event and requests financial assistance has the same chance of being awarded assistance. After the financial assistance cut-off date, which is usually in mid-April, The Family Café uses an automated process to place financial assistance requests in a random order. We then offer financial assistance to as many attendees we can afford in the order that is set through the lottery.

**Why don't more vendors come? I am glad to see the micro enterprise booths. Nice to see that our community offers some cool stuff to purchase. Makes me smile.**



The Family Café and our Planning Committee work throughout the year to attract as many Exhibitors to The Annual Family Café as possible. We are always looking for new leads and suggestions, so if you have particular vendors in mind that you think should be there please do let us know!

**How do you choose a hotel? This one is so nice, yet so large.**

The process of finding a property to host The Annual Family Café is lengthy. Large convention hotels typically book events like ours two to three years in advance, and the contracts usually account for multiple years. That's why The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café will once again be at the Hyatt Regency Orlando. It is definitely a large hotel, but because our event is so big, we are forced to use a property that is large enough to accommodate us.

**I would just like to say THANKS! I love it!!! You are awesome!!! I guess no one ever tells you guys thanks!**

You're welcome! We work really hard throughout the year to put The Annual Family Café together, and your gratitude is appreciated.

**How can I volunteer? I want to help all year long, not just at the Annual Family Café event in June.**

Thanks so much for your spirit of volunteerism! There are a couple ways that you can become more involved. One way is to become a member of CAN, our Change Agent Network. This membership-based group focuses on policy advocacy. Learn more about CAN at [cannow.org](http://cannow.org). Additionally, you may be interested in serving on The Family Café Planning Committee that puts The Annual Family Café together. If you would like to be part of the group that makes The Annual Family Café happen, send us an email at [info@familycafe.net](mailto:info@familycafe.net).

**There is so much to learn, and I am so thankful to you all. By the way, I love the Questions & Answers Book. When does it come out this year?**

The Family Café's Annual Questions & Answers Book is published in late November, and we mail it out to attendees of that year's event in early December. It is also posted to [familycafe.net](http://familycafe.net) at the same time.

**When is The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café? Are you going to host it back at the Hyatt Regency again? Love the hotel, it is just so large.**

The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café is scheduled for June 16-18, 2017, and will once again be held at The Hyatt Regency Orlando. We agree that it is a large hotel, but we have to host The Annual Family Café at a large hotel because so many people attend.

**The best part of the Family Café is the “Let’s Talk” series during the legislative session. It is great to have a resource that is dedicated to families.**

It’s great to hear that you find value in the “Let’s Talk!” Legislative Conference Call series that we host during the spring regular legislative session. It provides a great opportunity for people with disabilities and their families to stay apprised of legislation and public policy decisions that can impact them. We hope you will be able to join us for the “Let’s Talk!” series again this spring. We will be sure to let everyone know when that conference call series resumes.

**What I like best is that this event remains after all these years, dedicated to families and their needs. You have not altered your commitment to serving the families first. Great work! Great event! Thank you!!**

Thank you! The Family Café is committed to providing people with disabilities and their families with an opportunity for collaboration, advocacy, friendship and empowerment by serving as a facilitator of communication, a space for dialogue and a source of information. We intend to remain true to that commitment!

**Why don’t all the state entities come to the event and provide their materials? We could really use some from other than DOE and APD.**

The Family Café invites every State Agency that serves people with disabilities to participate in The Annual Family Café, and each agency decides how it will participate. In 2016, state sponsors included CareerSource Florida, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Education, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Division of Emergency Management and the Department of Health/Children’s Medical Services Network.

**I would like to serve on the planning committee for the Annual Family Café. How do I sign up?**

If you would like to be part of The Family Café Planning Committee, please contact us by email at [info@familycafe.net](mailto:info@familycafe.net).

**How can other states start up an event like this? My daughter lives in Alabama and attends this event in order to network and learn of resources.**

Thanks for that question. Because ours is a small staff, we don't currently have the capacity to expand our event to other states. We have spent many years cultivating our relationship with state government and other stakeholders in Florida. Any effort to create a statewide cross-disability event in another state would have to start with building similar relationships.

**Why not have vendors to donate food? The hotel is way too expensive.**

Thanks for that suggestion. We work with the hotel to create low-cost dining options for our attendees. We're pleased to let you know that the Hyatt Regency, which will host The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café next year, will offer a 20% dining discount for our attendees. We are also working with them to offer less expensive food for purchase in the event space. As the Hyatt is located on International Drive, there will be many dining options outside the hotel available.

It would be wonderful if we could identify a vendor to donate food. Unfortunately this can be a challenge due to the size of our event and the number of attendees. If you have suggestions as to vendors that may be able to donate food we would welcome them.

**Why do you chose Orlando each year? Ever thought about moving around the state or having smaller events throughout the state?**

The Family Café hosts its annual event in Orlando for several reasons. First of all, it is centrally located and therefore relatively easy to reach for a large number of families. It also has a large number of hotels with sufficient convention space to host The Annual Family Café.

At one time The Family Café did host smaller regional events, but we do not currently have funding to support that strategy. The most cost-effective, efficient way to reach the greatest number of people is to host a large-scale event in a central location.

## **How can I help you next year? I want to be a part of something like this event. Thank you!**

Thanks for your willingness to help! Each year we solicit volunteers to help on-site through the registration process. To sign up to serve as a room monitor or registration desk volunteer, simply note your availability on the registration form and The Family Café will contact you.

If you are interested in becoming more involved throughout the year, we would encourage you to join CAN, our Change Agent Network. This membership-based group focuses on policy advocacy. Learn more about CAN at [cannow.org](http://cannow.org).

## **What does The Youth Council do to help Florida youth?**

The Florida Youth Council is a group of youth and emerging leaders with disabilities that works to promote advocacy and engagement among their peers across Florida. This group exists to help its members develop leadership skills, while also encouraging them to connect with a wider audience of young people with disabilities, with the idea of growing a new generation of community leaders.

The FYC engages in number of activities year-round. They publish their newsletter, *The Noodle*, on a monthly basis to share a youth perspective on life and disability. They participate in activities surrounding Disability History and Awareness Weeks each October, to help the state's students learn about the experiences and contributions of people with disabilities. They also host their Annual Youth Summit each August, to bring together young people with disabilities from throughout Florida for information, training and networking. To learn more about the Florida Youth Council, visit their website at [www.floridayouthcouncil.com](http://www.floridayouthcouncil.com).

## **I will take all the love and new information with me and will share the knowledge I gained with people in need to know.**

Thanks for your positive feedback. It's our hope that everyone that attends is able to share what they learn with others in their communities when they return home, so it's great to hear that you plan on doing just that!

## **Who pays for The Family Café Summit on Disabilities?**

The Annual Family Café is funded through a combination of public and private resources. Organizations that helped fund The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café in 2016

included WellCare, ABLE United, AT&T, CareerSource Florida, Inc., CenturyLink, Disability Rights Florida, Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST), Florida Department of Children and Families, Florida Department of Education, Florida Department of Education/Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Florida Division of Emergency Management, Florida Department of Health/Children's Medical Services Network, and Publix Super Markets Charities. Revenue generated through the sale of Exhibit Hall booth spaces and professional registrations also contribute to the cost of hosting the event.

**This year's conference was spectacular. You guys have thought of everything. Must the convention hall be able to hang meat? It was so very cold! Also, it might be helpful, economically, if we had a list of eateries near the hotel. Hotel food gets expensive.**

Thanks for those comments.

It can be hard to make the temperature in the meeting spaces comfortable for everyone. As the rooms tend to get warm once there are large numbers of people in them, hotels will often make them cooler in advance of their being used. We will do our best to make sure it's comfortable for everyone next year.

Thanks for your suggestion on dining options. We appreciate that finding affordable dining options can be a challenge. At next year's Annual Family Café, the Hyatt Regency will offer a 20% discount on dining for our attendees at several of their restaurants. We are also working with them to offer less expensive food for purchase in the event space. As the Hyatt is located on International Drive, there will be many dining options outside the hotel available.

**Can you please provide more events on twice exceptional students? I am gifted and have other learning issues, and it's been a fight to get an IEP in my county.**

We agree that being an individual that is "twice exceptional" can be complicated. Students that are both gifted learners and individuals with disabilities or learning difficulties face unique challenges. We will share your desire for information on this topic at next year's Annual Family Café with our Planning Committee.

**Why don't we have kind of a "day care" for our "typical" children? We cannot attend the whole conference because they get bored easily.  
Thanks!**

The main reason that The Family Café does not provide day care or Respite for either typical children or those with disabilities is expense. At one point we did provide Respite for children with disabilities on a limited basis, but that service was discontinued because it served a very small number of families at high cost.

We realize that it can be a challenge to attend sessions while also taking care of your children's needs. Many families choose to have one adult take care of children, while another family member attends sessions. We make an effort to provide some activities for children, including arts and crafts, which can help you keep your kids entertained. That said, The Annual Family Café is a family event, and children of all ages are welcome.

### **What does The Florida Youth Council do? Who can be part of it?**

The Florida Youth Council (FYC) is a group of youth and emerging adults with disabilities. They work to promote disability awareness throughout the state, and empowerment and leadership among their peers. They host an Annual Youth Summit each August, where young people with disabilities come together for a day and a half of training, networking and empowerment. The FYC also promotes Disability History and Awareness Weeks each October, and publishes and distributes its newsletter, *The Noodle*, throughout the year. FYC members are selected through an interview process, and represent communities throughout the state. To learn more about the FYC, visit their website at [floridayouthcouncil.com](http://floridayouthcouncil.com), or contact Youth Advisor Niki Germain at [ngerman@familycafe.net](mailto:ngerman@familycafe.net).

### **For next year could we have a session for siblings to converse about their feelings, worries, and joys? Something for them alone?**

Thank you for that suggestion. This issue has been discussed by our Planning Committee often, and we agree that siblings of children with disabilities would benefit from a session at The Annual Family Café. We encourage you to find someone in your community that would be willing to lead such a session and have them submit a Presentation Proposal to our Planning Committee before the end of the year. Perhaps you would like to submit a proposal yourself?

### **Very nice venue. Staff very helpful. Nice diversity of presentations.**

Thanks! We work hard to put on a quality event. We're glad you enjoyed it.

**I just want to thank you for the great sessions that were delivered. There was too much walking if you have difficulty. This was my first time to attend and I enjoyed it and will come back again. Thank you again, God bless you for all your hard work.**

We're happy to hear that you enjoyed the sessions at the Annual Conference. We do our best to provide a good variety of informative sessions to meet our attendees' need for information.

We understand that the size of the hotel and convention center can make getting around difficult for some attendees. We try to find a balance between our need for a space large enough to house our event with our desire to maximize accessibility.

**I have volunteered three years now! Registration Desk! I think it would go smoother this way: I suggest that there be a Registration Desk for group homes to register. Ask for a list of names to be sent so we can set up a registration desk just for group homes or large groups of more than five. This would keep everyone from running around to each registration desk. Organize name badges on Thursday. Have a group of volunteers take the cards, assign a certain amount of alphabet to them. Have them tear and alphabetize their assigned letters.**

Thanks for volunteering to help at the registration desk. Our success depends to a great extent on the strength of our volunteers, and we really appreciate it. We understand that there are challenges involved in getting so many people registered on the opening morning of the event. Your suggestion regarding large groups is a good one, and we will look into implementing a system that will make it easier for groups to register. We typically alphabetize the name badges before registration opens so they should be ready to go when registration opens on Friday.

### ***Porque no hay mas seminarios en español?***

The Family Café is aware of the need for information among Spanish-speaking Floridians, and will continue to take steps to increase the number of sessions in Spanish at the Annual Conference. Spanish-language translators are available to accompany attendees to English-language sessions upon request. If you anticipate needing Spanish-language translation services, please remember to check the "Interpreter" box on the conference registration form.

*El Family Café es consciente de la necesidad de información entre los floridianos que habla español, y continuará tomando medidas para aumentar el número de sesiones en español en la Conferencia Anual. Los traductores en español están*



*disponibles para acompañar a los asistentes a las sesiones en inglés a petición. Si usted anticipa que necesita servicios de traducción en español, por favor recuerde marcar la casilla "Intérprete" en el formulario de inscripción a la conferencia.*

# **ABLE United**

## **What is the ABLE Act?**

The Stephen Beck, Jr. Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, a federal law enacted in December 2014, authorizes each state to establish a program that offers tax-free savings and investment options to encourage individuals with a disability and their families to save private funds to support health, independence, and quality of life. Money contributed to an account in one of these programs is generally disregarded when determining eligibility for federal benefit programs, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid.

In July 2015, the state of Florida created the ABLE United Program which launched on July 1, 2016.

## **What is the ABLE United Program?**

The ABLE United Program is the qualified ABLE program offered by the state of Florida. The Program is administered by Florida ABLE, Inc. a direct-support organization of the Florida Prepaid College Board (Board). The Board, established in 1987, oversees approximately \$15 billion in collective investments in the Stanley G. Tate Florida Prepaid College Program and the Florida 529 Savings Program.

## **What is an ABLE account?**

An ABLE account is a tax-free savings and investment account established to support qualified disability expenses for an individual with a disability, including living expenses. Money in an ABLE account is generally disregarded when determining eligibility for federal benefit programs, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid.

The ABLE United Program is the qualified ABLE program offered by the state of Florida. ABLE accounts in the ABLE United Program are referred to as ABLE United accounts.

## **Who may open an ABLE United account?**

There are three eligibility criteria for opening an ABLE United account:

### (1) Disability Severity Criteria

The individual must be blind or have a disability that meets the disability and severity requirements for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).

### (2) Disability Onset

The onset of blindness or disability must have occurred before the individual's 26th birthday. Current age is not considered when opening an ABLE United account – except that the account must be opened by an adult 18 years of age or older.

### (3) Florida Residency

The individual must be a Florida resident at the time of application.

## **Does my condition meet the eligibility requirements for an ABLE United account?**

An individual meets the disability and severity criteria to open an ABLE United account if at least one of the following are true:

1. The individual receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
2. The individual has a condition on the List of Compassionate Allowances Conditions maintained by the Social Security Administration.
3. The individual has a diagnosis from a physician that the individual has a medically determinable physical or mental impairment that results in marked and severe functional limitation(s), and which can be expected to result in death, or has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.

The Internal Revenue Service categorizes eligible disabilities as follows:

*Developmental Disorders: Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, Developmental delays and learning disabilities*

*Intellectual Disability: May be reported as mild, moderate, or severe intellectual disability*

*Psychiatric Disorders: Schizophrenia, Major depressive disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Anorexia Nervosa, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), Bipolar Disorder*

*Nervous Disorders: Blindness, Deafness, Cerebral Palsy, Muscular Dystrophy, Spina Bifida, Juvenile-onset Huntington's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Severe sensorineural hearing loss, Congenital cataracts*

*Congenital Anomalies: Chromosomal abnormalities, including Down Syndrome; Osteogenesis Imperfecta, Xeroderma Pigmentosum, Spinal muscular atrophy, Fragile X Syndrome, Edwards Syndrome*

*Respiratory Disorders: Cystic Fibrosis*

*Other: Includes Tetralogy of Fallot, Hypoplastic left heart syndrome, End-stage liver disease, Juvenile-onset rheumatoid arthritis, Sickle cell disease, Hemophilia, and any other disability not listed*

## **How will an ABLE United account affect my federal and state benefits?**

An ABLE United account is disregarded when determining federal and state benefit eligibility with the following two exceptions for individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI):

1. For the purposes of determining eligibility for SSI, money in an ABLE United account in excess of \$100,000 is considered an asset to the individual with a disability and may cause SSI benefits to be reduced or suspended. An account balance up to and including \$100,000 is disregarded.
2. A withdrawal that will be used for a housing expense but that is not spent in the same month will be considered an asset of the individual with a disability and may cause SSI benefits to be reduced or suspended.

There is no impact on Medicaid benefits, regardless of how much money is in the ABLE United account, even if SSI benefits are reduced or suspended due to the ABLE United account.

To determine whether your specific state benefits may be impacted, please contact your provider.

If the individual with a disability receives Medicaid from a state after establishing an ABLE United account, then, upon the death of the individual, the state may request Medicaid reimbursement for benefits paid after establishment of the ABLE United account and after all outstanding Qualified Disability Expenses have been paid.

## **How do I access funds in an ABLE United account?**

Money in an ABLE United account may be withdrawn at any time and for any reason via electronic transfer or check. If the money is spent on one of the following Qualified Disability Expenses, which are intended to include "living expenses" and are not required to be medically necessary, the earnings on the money withdrawn is tax-free:

- Health
- Education

- Housing
- Transportation
- Legal Fees
- Financial Management
- Employment Training and Support
- Assistive Technology and Personal Support Services
- Oversight and Monitoring
- Funeral and Burial
- Other expenses approved by the Secretary of the U.S. Treasury

### **Do withdrawals require approval from the ABLE United Program?**

No. The ABLE United Program does not approve withdrawals from an ABLE United account. Money may be withdrawn from an ABLE United account at any time and for any reason.

### **Who determines whether my expense is a Qualified Disability Expense?**

Each year, the ABLE United Program will report the total amount of distributions to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as part of our annual tax reporting. The IRS may investigate the distributions from an ABLE United account to determine if a withdrawal was for a Qualified Disability Expense.

In addition, the ABLE United Program will report the date and amount of each distribution from an ABLE United account to the Social Security Administration monthly. If the individual with a disability receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Medicaid, the Social Security Administration may investigate any distribution to determine if the withdrawal was for a Qualified Disability Expense.

In general, we recommend that documents and information adequate to justify each expense as qualified be retained by the individual or person administering the ABLE United account on their behalf.

### **How do I open an ABLE United account?**

You may open an ABLE United account quickly and easily online at [ableunited.com](http://ableunited.com). Enrollment may be completed by the individual with a disability or someone with legal authority over the individual, such as a parent or legal guardian.

### **Who may contribute to an ABLE United account?**

Anyone may contribute to an ABLE United account on behalf of the individual with a disability, including the individual, an employer, friends and family. Contributions are considered a completed gift.

**Is there a limit to the amount of money that may be contributed to an ABLE United account?**

The individual with a disability and others contributing on their behalf, may contribute up to \$14,000 in total to an ABLE Account each year.

Contributions are not allowed if and when the account balance is at, or above, \$418,000.

**Who owns and manages an ABLE United account?**

The individual with a disability is the owner of the ABLE United account and may manage the account independently. However, if the individual is not able or chooses not to establish or manage the account, a parent, legal guardian or someone authorized by the individual may establish and oversee the account.

**How are the funds in an ABLE United Account invested?**

The ABLE United Program offers multiple savings and investment options with varying degrees of investment risk. An individual with a disability, or an authorized person on their behalf, may choose the most appropriate option(s). The underlying savings and investment products for each investment option are managed by professional investment management firms selected by the ABLE United Program based on investment philosophy and strategy; performance history; and organizational experience and financial stability.

# **The Agency for Health Care Administration**

**How can someone get insurance as a disabled person (Parkinson Disease) once Medicaid drops due to having SSDI over the state limit of \$400.00 per month? Right now myself, wife and son get SSDI about \$400.00 over the limit for Medicaid.**

Eligibility criteria for Medicaid are established by federal and state laws and regulations. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the state agency responsible for determining Medicaid Eligibility. For questions about Medicaid eligibility, please contact DCF at 1-866-762-2237.

**I need a hearing aide. How do I go about getting one? Thanks.**

In Florida, most Medicaid recipients are required to enroll in a Managed Medical Assistance (MMA) plan. Recipients may contact their MMA plan directly to request assistance with obtaining Medicaid covered services, including hearing aids, which are a covered benefit if medically necessary. Recipients can also contact the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055 if they need assistance.

**My sister has post-polio syndrome and needs information and services. She doesn't have much money and just became Medicaid eligible**

In Florida, most Medicaid recipients are required to enroll in a Managed Medical Assistance (MMA) plan. Recipients may contact their MMA plan directly to request assistance obtaining Medicaid covered services. Recipients can also contact the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055 if they need assistance.

**How do I access medical supplies that Medicaid does not cover?**

Florida Medicaid pays for services that are medically necessary. Children under age 21 can receive services that are not on the list of Medicaid-covered services if they meet certain conditions. If you are under age 21 and enrolled in a Medicaid health plan, please contact the plan for information on how to request a special services coverage determination. If you are on fee-for-service Medicaid, please have your medical equipment provider follow the instructions for Multi-Specialty Services Authorization Request at <http://www.ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/childhealthservices/chc-up/index.shtml>.



If you are an adult age 21 or older there may be local community resources that can benefit you. United Way 211 Community Resource Directory has a list of local health resources on their website that may assist you in finding services. United Way 211's website may be accessed through the following link:  
<http://www.referweb.net/211communityresources/>.

**Why can't the med waiver follow clients from state to state? This way they would avoid waiting to restart services.**

Not all states offer the same Medicaid coverage. States are allowed to set their own rules regarding Medicaid coverage as long as they stay within federal guidelines. The Federal Government would need to change Medicaid laws to require all states to cover the same services.

**When will noon-traditional therapies like recreation, hippotherapy, dance, etc. be covered?**

Under the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care (SMMC) Managed Medical Assistance (MMA) program, most Medicaid recipients receive their medical services through a health plan. The MMA plans offer expanded benefits beyond those currently covered by the traditional fee-for-service Medicaid program. These benefits include waived copayments, additional therapy services, and over the counter medication and supplies. Details regarding the scope of covered benefits may vary by health plan. Please see the chart below for a list of standard plans and the expanded benefits they offer.

List of Expanded Benefits	Amerigroup	Better	Coventry	Humana	Molina	Prestige	Community	Simply	Staywell	Sunshine	United
Adult dental services	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Adult hearing services	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Adult vision services	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Art therapy	Y			Y	Y				Y	Y	
Equine therapy									Y		
Home health care for non-pregnant adults	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Influenza vaccine	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Medically related lodging & food		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Newborn circumcisions	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Nutritional counseling	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Outpatient hospital services	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Over the counter medication and supplies	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Pet therapy				Y	Y				Y			
Physician home visits	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Pneumonia vaccine	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Post-discharge meals	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Prenatal/Perinatal visits	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Primary care visits for non-pregnant adults	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Shingles vaccine	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Waived co-payments	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Physical, Occupational, & Speech Therapy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

**Is it possible to have both Medicaid and Medicare?**

Yes, a person may be eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid. These recipients are referred to as dual eligible.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) is the agency responsible for determining Medicare eligibility. SSA’s toll-free number is 1-800-772-1213. The SSA can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Medicaid is operated by states, and eligibility requirements vary from state to state. To apply for Medicaid in Florida, you can apply online at <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>. For questions about Medicaid eligibility, please contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) at 1-866-762-2237.

**I need a scoter. I am 64 years old with a disability. The commercials make it look so easy to get one. Medicare will not cover the cost for me . . . why?**

Medicare is a federal program that is different than state Medicaid programs. For questions relating to services covered by Medicare, please contact Medicare by calling 1-800-633-4227.

**My family needs to access services from Medicaid and I do need to know, how do I qualify?**

If you would like to speak to someone about general Medicaid eligibility requirements and whether you qualify, please contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) at 1-866-762-2237. You may also simply apply online at <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>. There is no cost to apply, and most people will find out very quickly whether they qualify.

**Do you realize insurance companies deny hard working middle class families like mine the right to have DME supplies as a covered benefit? United Health Care under Medicaid/Medicare? My son has spina bifida and needs to catheterize 4 times a day. Our monthly out of pocket is \$500.00. Catheters are a covered Medicaid benefit. Would you want to reuse these?**

As required by federal law, Florida Medicaid provides services to eligible recipients under the age of 21 years, if such services are medically necessary. Services for recipients under the age of 21 years exceeding the coverage described in the Medicaid State Plan may be approved, if medically necessary.

In Florida, most Medicaid recipients are required to enroll in a Managed Medical Assistance (MMA) plan. Recipients may contact their MMA plan directly to get help accessing services and supplies. If you are denied a service or supply, or get less of it than you asked for, you have the right to appeal this decision through your MMA plan or through a Medicaid Fair Hearing.

You can also call the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055 to ask for help getting services or with an appeal, or to report a complaint about your MMA plan.. You can also report a complaint online at: <http://ahca.myflorida.com/SMMC>. Click the blue "Report a Complaint" button and complete the online form. Complaints are reviewed and tracked throughout the day by Medicaid staff.

For questions relating to services covered by Medicare, please contact Medicare by calling 1-800-633-4227.

**Why won't Medicaid pay for a bilateral cochlear implants?**

Florida Medicaid pays for one cochlear implant device per recipient in either ear, but not both.

However, as required by federal law, Florida Medicaid provides services to eligible recipients under the age of 21 years, if such services are medically necessary to correct or ameliorate a defect, a condition, or a physical or mental illness. As such, services for recipients under the age of 21 years exceeding the coverage described above may be approved, if medically necessary.

In Florida, most Medicaid recipients are required to enroll in a Managed Medical Assistance (MMA) plan. Recipients may contact their MMA plan directly to request assistance obtaining Medicaid covered services. Recipients can also contact the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055.

### **How come some people get Medicaid and others do not?**

Eligibility criteria for Medicaid are established by federal and state laws and regulations. The Federal Government or the State Legislature would have to pass a bill to make changes in who gets Medicaid.

Generally speaking, an individual must meet specific requirements in order to be eligible for Medicaid. Each group has specific age, income, and asset limit requirements. Persons may be eligible for full or limited Medicaid benefits. In Florida, at age 21, recipients are considered an adult, and will become eligible under a different group that has different benefits.

If you would like to speak to someone about general Medicaid eligibility requirements and whether you qualify, please contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) at 1-866-762-2237.

### **Who provides dental care coverage, Medicaid or Medicare?**

Florida Medicaid reimburses for dental services for recipients under the age of 21 years including:

- Crowns
- Diagnostic evaluations
- Endodontics
- Full and partial dentures
- Oral surgery
- Orthodontic treatment (limited)
- Periodontal services
- Preventive services

- Radiographs necessary to make a diagnosis
- Restorations

Medicaid reimburses for acute emergency dental procedures to alleviate pain or infection, dentures and denture-related procedures for recipients 21 years and older including:

- Comprehensive oral evaluation
- Denture-related procedures
- Full dentures and partial dentures
- Incision and drainage of an abscess
- Radiographs necessary to make a diagnosis
- Problem-focused oral evaluation

People who receive Medicaid through fee-for-service or Managed Medical Assistance plans can get the dental services listed above.

For questions relating to services covered by Medicare, please contact Medicare by calling 1-800-633-4227.

**I am paying for my daughter's medicine on \$648.00 that she lives on. She is diabetic. It is either Medicare or living. She needs free diabetic meds and equipment.**

Please submit an application to both Medicare and Medicaid to see if your daughter is eligible to receive benefits through these programs.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) determines Medicare eligibility. SSA's toll-free number is 1-800-772-1213. They can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday.

To apply for Medicaid in Florida, you can apply online at <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>. For questions about Medicaid eligibility, please contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) at 1-866-762-2237.

There may also be local community resources that can benefit you. United Way 211 Community Resource Directory has a list of local health resources on their website that may assist you in finding services. United Way 211's website may be accessed through the following link:  
<http://www.referweb.net/211communityresources/>

**If a child shows great improvement using a walking device in therapy, how is it that this is denied through Medicare due to a “cap”?**

Medicare is a federal program that is different than state Medicaid programs. For questions relating to services covered by Medicare, please contact Medicare by calling 1-800-633-4227.

**Why is it so hard to get vital medication on Medicaid with all the “prior authorization” approval requirements over and over? My son has cystic fibrosis and all the paperwork has to be redone every 6 months and this delays his medication.**

Please call your Medicaid health plan or the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055 for help with your child’s medications. You can also submit a complaint through our Web site at: <http://ahca.myflorida.com/SMMC>. Select the blue “Report a Complaint” button and complete the online form. Complaints are reviewed and tracked throughout the day by Medicaid staff.

# **The Agency for Persons with Disabilities**

**What services are available to an individual who has no family or social support, and has been unable to get disability benefits though he has limited use of one leg and weakness on one side of his body? He has no transportation and has financial challenges. Are there services for him? He is on the med waiver and his coordinator does not know of anything. I have met several people who have fallen through the cracks and are just like the person I describe above. What can APD do? I waited in line to talk with the Director, but she left.**

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) maintains the Resource Directory as an informational service to help individuals with disabilities learn about available resources. It is available at <http://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>. Additionally, if you contact your APD regional office they may be able to recommend resources in your particular area.

**Does APD promote Special Olympics or any other outdoor or sports activity?**

APD is very supportive of the Special Olympics. A majority of the athletes who participate in Special Olympics are APD customers. Residents from Sunland Center in Marianna and Tacachale Center in Gainesville regularly participate in the Special Olympics.

Additionally, funding for the health screenings for the Special Olympics comes through APD and goes to their organization.

**Why are there no guidelines to teach clients in group homes a healthy lifestyle in what they eat and exercise? They all have rights, but the group home should have the right to teach clients the right way to get a healthy lifestyle. Teach them how to eat smaller healthier meals and put them on an exercise program. There are so many clients that have health problems, and heart disease or diabetes with obesity, etc. ONE BIG PROBLEM.**

APD is constantly working to improve existing services. Your feedback is very important to us. Suggestions or questions can be submitted to our agency email at [APD.info@apdcares.org](mailto:APD.info@apdcares.org).



**Do the Family Care Councils know of local resources and discounts for people with disabilities?**

There are various resources to help individuals with disabilities. The APD Resource Directory is one place you can look by visiting <http://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>.

**Does anyone have information on the best way to plan for persons with disabilities to be able to get married? I do not want to lose the waiver that I am on. How do you plan so they won't lose the waiver benefits? Is there any other advice someone at APD might have? I am referring mainly to persons with intellectual disabilities on the waiver.**

You may want to talk to your Waiver Support Coordinator about maintaining your Medicaid eligibility. You can also contact the APD regional office for more information. As you are located in Lakeland, the Central Region Office's phone number is 407-245-0440.

**When will the definition of "autism" be corrected so APD can stop using that outdated definition as an excuse to refuse services to children with autistic spectrum disorder? The current definition of ASD can be found in the diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders version 5 (DSM-V).**

Section 393.063(5), Florida Statutes, defines autism as: "a pervasive, neurologically based developmental disability of extended duration which causes severe learning, communication, and behavior disorders with age of onset during infancy or childhood. Individuals with autism exhibit impairment in reciprocal social interaction, impairment in verbal and nonverbal communication and imaginative ability, and a markedly restricted repertoire of activities and interests."

Rule 65G-4.014(1), Florida Administrative Code, further defines autism as:

(1) Autism means a condition which meets the requirements of Section 393.063, F.S. that the condition is:

- (a) Pervasive, meaning always present and without interruption;
- (b) Neurologically based, meaning that the condition is not the result of physical impairment;
- (c) A developmental disability with age of onset during infancy or childhood;

(d) With extended duration, meaning that the condition reasonably can be expected to continue indefinitely into the future;

(e) Causes severe learning disorders resulting in both severe communication disorders affecting both verbal and nonverbal skills, and severe behavior disorders. Autism is characterized by an individual evidencing at least six of the following twelve features from the following subparts 1 and 2, with at least one feature from subpart 2:

1. Severe communication disorders, which may include:
  - a. A delay in, or total lack of, the development of spoken language (not accompanied by an attempt to compensate through alternative modes of communication such as gesture or mime);
  - b. Stereotyped and repetitive use of language or idiosyncratic language;
  - c. For those applicants with speech, marked impairment in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body postures, and gestures to regulate social interaction;
  - d. Failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level;
  - e. A lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people (e.g., by a lack of showing, bringing, pointing out objects of interest, or achievements to others);
  - f. Lack of social or emotional reciprocity;
  - g. Marked impairment in the ability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others in individuals with adequate speech; or
  - h. Impaired imaginative ability evidenced by a lack of varied, spontaneous make-believe play or social imitative play appropriate to developmental level.
2. Severe behavior disorders, which are restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities which may include:
  - a. Encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus;
  - b. Apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals
  - c. Stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g., hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements); or
  - d. Persistent preoccupation with parts of objects.

This definition does not exclude individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. The eligibility criteria for autism through APD requires that the individual exhibit severe deficits in certain areas. There are some individuals who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and meet the statutory eligibility criteria for APD services.

**What support is available to groups interested in creating long term housing solutions? We are currently on the waiver programs with APD. What is the agency doing to help with the "How to" of low cost housing hunting financially? Is there a seminar produced or is APD hosting webinars that teach the basics of financing for housing?**

As you are on the waiver, work with your waiver support coordinator to help determine the best housing option to meet your needs.

**Why were there no fibromyalgia seminars by APD or DOH this year? It is a hidden disease like arthritis.**

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves individuals with developmental disabilities as defined in Florida Statutes, Chapter 393. This includes individuals who have Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, autism, intellectual disabilities, Prader-Willi syndrome, Phelan-McDermid syndrome, and children ages 3 to 5 who are at high risk for having a developmental disability.

The legislature decides which disabilities APD serves.

**As an APD client, can you provide a seminar from APD on how to get guardianships without a lawyer? APD needs to help us!**

APD does have a brochure produced on guardianship. It can be found at:  
<http://apd.myflorida.com/brochures/Decision-Making%20Options%20Brochure%202013.pdf>

Guardianship is an option for those who need help in decision making. It requires two actions by a court: a ruling on your decision-making ability and the transfer of some or all of your rights to the guardian.

**Is it possible to create more Family Care Councils that actually produce or create a parent support or resource group? We could share emails, phone numbers of those participating in classes for ongoing support, advocating, etc.**

In 1993, the Florida Legislature created the Family Care Councils (FCC) giving self-advocates and families a voice in the decisions affecting the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities. FCC members are volunteer advocates appointed to serve by the governor. Councils are comprised of individuals with developmental disabilities, parents, siblings, and court-appointed guardians. The council's primary functions are to:

- assist in providing information and outreach to self-advocates and families;
- review the effectiveness of the APD and make recommendations with respect to implementation;
- advise the APD administrators on the community and family support systems in their area; and
- meet and share information with other area FCCs.

Many council members network with various committees, initiatives and task forces throughout the state on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities. Through the Family Care Council Florida (FCCF), representatives of each council meet quarterly to educate and discuss common concerns while working together to represent individuals with developmental disabilities and their families as a united voice. Additional information about the FCCs, including valuable resources, FCCF publications, and upcoming conferences/events are available on their web site at [www.fccflorida.org](http://www.fccflorida.org).

**This may be outside your expertise, but APD should make this meeting mandatory and offer CEU's so support coordinators/caretakers can come and learn/network with each other.**

APD is reviewing the possibility of offering continuing education credits to waiver support coordinators who attend certain sessions during the Family Café.

**Will the needs for behavioral services for those with Down syndrome and who are getting APD services be measured during the first year of the new law of ABA for Down syndrome?**

We are assuming that you are referring to the passage of the Out-of-Network Health Insurance Coverage law passed earlier this year. This law requires health insurance contracts to cover speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and applied behavior analysis (ABA) services for individuals with Down's Syndrome, which is identical to the current required coverage for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

With regard to “measuring” this specific service and its utilization, I don’t know whether there is a specific plan to “watch” or track the impact of the law or not. Although some information could be generated about utilization within our data system, we would not know who is receiving ABA funded through insurance.

Individuals who receive services, including applied behavior analysis, funded under the iBudget Waiver have all their services included in their cost plans within the iBudget data system. In addition, information about how an individual was determined eligible for services, and their diagnostic information, like Down’s syndrome, is identified in our data system for each recipient. This would enable us to look at those individuals with Down’s syndrome who received or are receiving behavior analysis services under the Waiver and the number of service units used.

However, because the law is specific to coverage through insurance (not the Waiver) it’s plausible that Waiver expenditures for ABA for those with Down’s syndrome might go down, because the Waiver is the payer of last resort. That is to say, if other sources of funding are used for ABA, that will not be in the person’s cost plan, and we will not get a sense of whether more individuals with Down’s syndrome are getting ABA (or more ABA) subsequent to the new law.

**It has been extremely difficult to try to find employers willing to provide flexibility or alternative accommodations to a person having both a cognitive and physical disability which makes keeping a schedule difficult. Being on time, lack of organization, and extreme fatigue are big issues in this. When trying to bring it up, even to disability-oriented organizations, or APD support coordinators, they are always unable to help, saying that you have to be there on time and for the hours required. Someday I am not sure when my body will decide to “function” or not. How do I get the necessary help from my support coordinator to advocate with me on my behalf?**

The Legislature renewed the appropriation of \$500,000 for use during FY 2016-17 to assist individuals on the Waiting List, primarily those transitioning from school to work, for a 4th year. APD has allocated approximately \$2500 per EEP job seeker to provide Supported Employment Coaching for individuals not working with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to obtain and maintain competitive employment and participate in paid or unpaid internships as a path to employment. Any individual in Florida who meets APD eligibility, on the APD Waiting List, and over the age 18 may be considered for participation in the EEP.

Another resource you may want to consider is Vocational Rehabilitation. VR is a federal-state program that helps people who have physical or mental disabilities

get or keep a job. VR is committed to helping people with disabilities find meaningful careers.

**Is there any way for someone to create a “flow chart” of agencies so that consumers and providers can navigate the system and locate services? What is APD doing to recruit the needed providers?**

APD’s Navigator is a new online system to help families navigate the complexities of government.

**I would like to see APD support more parent to parent opportunities**

Thank you for your suggestion. Our goal is to provide the most relevant and helpful services to our customers.

The Family Care Councils consist of parents and guardians who share information to improve services and resources for families.

**How do we include individuals with disabilities more in outdoor activities and sports? The group homes do not do anything to promote health and wellness of body and spirit.**

The Florida Disabled Outdoors Association (FDOA) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that is working to enrich lives through accessible inclusive recreation. Since its inception in 1990, the FDOA has promoted accessible recreation to persons with disabilities as well as the general public through its hands-on recreation programs, newsletters and community outreach and education.

You can call FDOA at (850) 201-2944 for more information or visit their website: <https://fdoa.memberclicks.net/>.

**Support Coordinators should share more information on spasticity or CP with the families that they serve. We get providers, but not support for living with a disability in the community. Why is this?**

For issues with or questions about a disability please contact your doctor or other medical professional.

APD works in partnership with local communities to support people with developmental disabilities in living, learning, and working in their communities.

APD provides critical services and supports for customers with developmental disabilities so they can reach their full potential.

**Why were there no supports under the waiver for fibromyalgia? This is a hidden disease, similar to arthritis. How can we address this?**

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves individuals with developmental disabilities as defined in Florida Statutes, Chapter 393. This includes individuals who have Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, autism, intellectual disabilities, Prader-Willi syndrome, Phelan-McDermid syndrome, and children ages 3 to 5 who are at high risk for having a developmental disability.

The legislature decides which disabilities APD serves.

**I would like to know about this new syndrome that just got added to the waiver. I never heard of it before. How and why did the state decide to provide services or add to the waiver a new diagnosis when we cannot serve all that are currently waiting for services? How bizarre. Serve the ones that are waiting before adding more conditions/diseases. What?**

In 2016, the Florida Legislature authorized 2.5 million dollars to offer waiver enrollment to individuals with Phelan-McDermid syndrome who meet the eligibility requirements of section 393.065(1), Florida Statutes.

Phelan-McDermid syndrome is a disorder caused by the loss of the terminal segment of the long arm of chromosome 22, which occurs near the end of the chromosome at a location designated q13.3, typically leading to developmental delay, intellectual disability, dolicocephaly, hypotonia, or absent or delayed speech.

**I am still on the wait list. Have you forgotten about us? I heard the Governor state that all were going to be served with the new money. Yes! When, where and how do I sign up? My son has been on the "wait list" for 13 years. Help us now!**

Each year, the number of individuals who can be added to the waiver is contingent on the funding appropriated to APD by the Florida Legislature. As funding becomes available, the agency will enroll individuals from the waiting list. I encourage you to contact your local legislators with your concerns and ideas for APD's funding. If you feel your situation is a crisis, please contact your local APD office and request that a Crisis Identification Tool be completed. A crisis situation is defined as the

individual being a danger to self or others, homeless, or their caregiver is unable to provide care.

The waiting list is divided into categories based on a prioritization tool. There is no standard length of time individuals wait. Please contact the state support coordinator at the APD regional office that serves your area. Contact information can be found online at <http://apdcares.org/region/>.

**What is being done about the lack of qualified providers who need to provide services throughout the state? There is a lack of DME providers, PT/OT providers . . . etc. I asked this question a few years back and was told to contact a lady in Tallahassee and she NEVER returned my calls. My repeated calls for help. So help me now!**

APD has an online community resource directory that contains thousands of federal, state, and local resources. You can access the resource directory at <http://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>. You may also want to contact your APD regional office or your support coordinator for additional information on local providers. You can also use the online provider search tool at <http://www.flddresources.org/ProviderSearch.aspx> to find providers in your area.

**How do I get on the Medicaid waiver? My son is almost 3 and I need to transition into care for him. He has autism.**

To apply for services from the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, which includes waiver participation or placement in an intermediate care facility for the developmentally disabled (ICF/DD), submit an application to the APD office that serves your area, either by mail or by hand delivery. Faxed submissions will be returned for an original signature.

Visit this webpage for more information on eligibility and applying for services: <http://apdcares.org/docs/app%20eligl%20info.pdf>

To be eligible for services from the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, you must be a Florida resident and have one of the following six developmental disabilities: autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities, Down syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, spina bifida or children age 3-5 who are at a high risk of a developmental disability. You can apply for services through one of the APD regional offices.

After applying, and if you have been found eligible to receive services, you will be placed on a waiting list based on the date you were determined eligible.



Placement on the waiver is done by category and that category would only be determined by an assessment. We would be unable to speculate which category your son would be placed.

**Last summer Governor Scott pulled the APD and V.R. Rehab grant (with little notice) in Charlotte County. This loss of funds has had serious impact. Our County doesn't have much for adults with special needs so any loss is noticeable. We lost a very nice program w/dedicated staff that serve both those on the med waiver and wait list. Also ARC New Vision Program lost a large amount of funding so its long term outcome is a concern. Don't know about other counties but in Charlotte the lack of providers and services do greatly make what little we had even so need less. Please comment on this situation and our county. This was not addressed Friday night.**

APD has an online community resource directory that contains thousands of federal, state, and local resources. You can access the resource directory at <http://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>. You may also want to contact your APD regional office or your support coordinator for additional information on local providers. The regional office that serves your area can be reached at 1-800-615-8720. You can also use the online provider search tool at <http://www.flddresources.org/ProviderSearch.aspx> to find providers in your area.

**22Q11 Deletion, also known as DeGeorge Syndrome or Veligo Cardio Facial Syndrome is the second most common genetic syndrome behind Down syndrome, but it is not recognized as a predefined disability for some of the laws. Autism is automatically included in the laws, 22q11 should be included as well. It is definitely diagnosed with a genetic test and can lead to over 100 different problems across all body systems, including complex heart defects, low immune, hypocalcemia, neurological problem, learning disabilities and mental illness. It seems that those with the largest lobby groups get the services easy. The rest of us have to fight for it.**

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves individuals with developmental disabilities as defined in Florida Statutes, Chapter 393. This includes individuals who have Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, autism, intellectual disabilities, Prader-Willi syndrome, Phelan-McDermid syndrome, and children ages 3 to 5 who are at high risk for having a developmental disability. The legislature decides which disabilities APD serves.

**Who do I contact within APD (as my support coordinator says they cannot help)? As a single mom I cannot afford internet, what do I do for securing appointments and getting my information? I cannot go to the library with my two children . . . it is too hard. Fixed income less than 900.00 a month. We live off of SSI. No food stamps! Hurting . . . and need a phone and internet access for services for my 2 kids.**

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) maintains the Resource Directory as an informational service to help individuals with disabilities learn about available resources. It is available at <http://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>. Additionally, if you contact your APD regional office they may be able to recommend resources in your particular area.

**It is very distressing when a developmentally disabled person must be admitted to the hospital and hospital staff is not educated on how to provide the specialized care these individuals need. Most times these are not funds available for caregiver support. These people are served food but cannot feed themselves so they go hungry. How can hospitals get away with this when they have funds in reserve (charity type)? Why do the appropriate state level entities not take the steps to alleviate this problem?**

It is important that if your loved one has issues that you make hospital staff aware of them. Hospital staff is able to make accommodations for patients.

**Not really a question but a general comment: certain populations of people are falling through the cracks. For example, physically disabled, not developmentally disabled, acquired post childhood before seniors. There is little out there to help us.**

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves individuals with developmental disabilities as defined in Florida Statutes, Chapter 393. This includes individuals who have Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, autism, intellectual disabilities, Prader-Willi syndrome, Phelan-McDermid syndrome, and children ages 3 to 5 who are at high risk for having a developmental disability.

There are various resources to help individuals with disabilities. The APD Resource Directory is one place you can look by visiting [www.apdcares.org/resourcedirectory](http://www.apdcares.org/resourcedirectory).

**When is APD implementing that new software so that we can see our records?**

We have begun development of the APD iConnect system. We anticipate a rollout date to provider sometime in late 2017 and families will be able to access iConnet in 2018.

**Need help navigating government agencies and services available. Very overwhelming process and confusing roles of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, or APD.**

APD has an online community resource directory that contains thousands of federal, state, and local resources. You can access the resource directory at <http://resourcedirectory.apd.myflorida.com/resourcedirectory/>. You may also want to contact your APD regional office or your support coordinator for additional information on local providers. You can also use the online provider search tool at <http://www.fldresources.org/ProviderSearch.aspx> to find providers in your area.

**My question is related to both APD and The Family Café, relating to both providers and clients. I am a provider and I gladly brought three clients to The Annual Family Café and I know more than that would love to come, but they (like my clients) do not have anyone (family-wise) to take and help them during the Annual conference. I would like you to offer CEU's for providers or endorse the event so that more would come and bring their clients and become better more knowledgeable providers and advocates.**

APD is reviewing the possibility of offering continuing education credits to waiver support coordinators who attend certain sessions during the Family Café.

**Is there a way to get Medicaid waiver services for a minor child, where income does not apply?**

Parents' income is usually calculated. If the child has critical needs and is offered waiver services, the Florida Department of Children & Families can determine the child is a family of one and become eligible without parents' income being a factor.

**What is next for the CDC+ program/session? What are the upcoming enhancements? We would love to hear more about these.**

### System Enhancement/Implementation: CDC Fiscal Employer Application

The CDC+ program uses a Web-based application called the CDC+ Fiscal Employer/Agent (CDCF/EA) system. This system collects, tracks, and produces information related to claims submitted by the CDC+ consumer/representative, consumer monthly statements, and tax information among other things. The CDCF/EA system is the central hub for all claims submitted through the Secure Web Payroll System and calling in directly to the toll-free Customer Service line. APD is working closely with APDIT on the system design and business requirements for an enhancement that would correspond with the CDC+ Purchasing Plan system.

The enhancement will allow the consumer/representative to be able to see the total number of units authorized in the current Purchasing Plan, how many units have been purchased in a month and how many units were left. This enhancement will also enable CDC+ to add/edit provider information quicker and will provide additional reporting features.

A trial payroll run has been completed successfully, this test ensured that the correct information fields were updated. APDIT is currently testing the User Interfaces, which is what the consumer/representative will use when submitting claims.

Prior to implementing the enhancement, training will be offered to all consumers/representatives, consultants, and other APD/CDC staff. CDC+ hopes to implement the enhancement sometime during the first quarter of 2017. CDC+ will be running both the enhanced system and the current payroll process concurrently in the beginning to ensure all information is being updated correctly.

### System Enhancement/Implementation: CDC+ Consumer and Purchasing Plan Application

The CDC+ Purchasing Plan Application (CDCPP) is APD's central repository for all information obtained from the consumer's CDC+ Application and Purchasing Plans that have been submitted.

APD is working closely with APDIT on the system design and business requirements for the Purchasing Plan enhancement. The enhancement will allow the consumer/representative to electronically enter and submit a Purchasing Plan. This enhancement will also include the ability for the system to automatically calculate consumer monthly budgets based on the consumer's current/approved cost plan in the iBudget system. Due to the enormity of the project, it was broken

into three (3) phases for development and implementation and work has begun on the automated monthly budget phase.

This enhancement will be implemented sometime after the CDCF/EA enhancement.

# The Department of Children and Families

## **Can you tell me about the system of care grant that Florida has applied for? How will this help our families?**

The Department of Children and Families recently received a federal award for a Children's Mental Health System of Care Expansion and Sustainability Project (SOC Project). A major goal of this project is to empower and create opportunities for families and youth to impact their behavioral health care. Increasing the number of sustainable family- and youth-run organizations statewide is one way this project will achieve this goal. Additionally, SOC Project team members will be working to increase the number of certified family peer specialists and family support groups. These peer specialists and support groups will assist parents in navigating the behavioral health system to get the best care for their children. To learn more about developing a sustainable family-run organization or joining a local family support group, you may contact the SOC Project Director and she will connect you to your local children's mental health system of care coordinator. Dr. Qasimah Boston, SOC Project Director may be reached by email at: [Qasimah.Boston@myflfamilies.com](mailto:Qasimah.Boston@myflfamilies.com) or by phone at: 850-717-4435.

## **How do I apply for food stamps? The economy is killing my family. I have 4 kids to feed and my job pays too low of a wage to cover all the expenses of a family. When I call no one answers and I do not have a computer.**

If you do not have a computer, you may choose to visit a local community partner. The ACCESS call center, at 1-866-762-2237, is answered 24/7 by our interactive voice response system. From there you can ask to speak to a call agent and they will help you find a community partner.

If you have a phone with an internet browser (smartphone), you can find a community partner by searching with your zip code at: <https://access-web.dcf.state.fl.us/CPSLookup/search.aspx>.

## **When will police departments in Florida get training on how to appropriately act with the mentally ill population and stop bullying people who are mentally ill?**

One of the duties of the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission within the Florida Department of Law Enforcement is to establish uniform minimum training standards for officers in the various criminal justice disciplines. As a prerequisite to certification, individuals must successfully complete a basic

recruit course, which includes several lessons that focus on substance abuse and mental health.

A 40-hour advanced Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) course that emphasizes mental health-related topics, crisis resolution skills, and de-escalation training is offered in locations throughout the state. The Florida CIT training model is the result of community collaborations and partnerships among law enforcement agencies, local mental health and substance abuse treatment providers, mental health advocacy groups, and consumers of mental health services and their families. CIT is more than simply offering training; it establishes teams of trained officers within the law enforcement agency to respond effectively to individuals with mental illnesses, including those with co-occurring substance use disorders that are in crisis. The following goals form the basis for Florida's CIT teams:

- Better prepare police officers to handle crises involving people with mental illnesses, including those with co-occurring substance use disorders that are in crisis;
- Increase law enforcement officer safety, consumer safety and overall community safety;
- Collaboratively make the mental health system more understandable, responsive and accessible to law enforcement officers to the greatest extent possible with community resources;
- Supply law enforcement officers with the resources to appropriately refer people in need of care to the mental health and substance abuse services and treatment system;
- Improve access to mental health and substance abuse services and treatment in general and crisis care in specific for people who are encountered by law enforcement; and
- Divert people with a mental illness who are in crisis from the criminal justice system whenever possible, which is consistent with the Baker Act or Marchman Act.

The 2015 Legislature appropriated \$800,000 to the Florida Sheriffs Association to enhance CIT training for law enforcement and correctional officers in local sheriff's offices and police departments across the state. The Legislature specified that the training must include evidence-based approaches designed to improve the outcomes of law enforcement interactions with persons who have mental health issues.

Additional information about the program and related training can be found at: <http://floridacit.org/>.

**Why can't a parent receive benefits like food stamps and unemployment, if they are unable to work due to circumstances with their child with special needs?**

Parents and children can receive food assistance with their children that live with them if the amount of the unemployment does not exceed the gross income limit for the size of the household and they meet all other factors of eligibility.

**Have there been cuts to the mental health program for children? I hope not, because the expenses of providers in getting treatment is very high. Medications are high also. We need services!**

Mental health services for children are funded primarily by the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) for those enrolled in Medicaid and by the Department of Children and Families, Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health. How services are funded may impact the cost of those services and how a person would access them.

AHCA provides mental health services to children through the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care (SMMC) program. Medicaid recipients can obtain information on how to access services and how to submit complaints on the AHCA website at the following link. [http://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/statewide\\_mc/recipients.shtml](http://ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/statewide_mc/recipients.shtml).

The department funds children's mental health services using federal block grant funds and state general revenue through contracts with Managing Entities (MEs). Federal and state funds have not been reduced in recent years. Over the last three years, the Legislature appropriated special funding for Community Action Teams (CAT) to address the needs of youth and young adults with mental health conditions, recognizing the need for effective services and support for these young people.

Information about the Southeast Florida Behavioral health Network, the ME in your community, can be accessed at the following link on the Department's website. <http://sefbhn.worldsecuresystems.com/index.html>

**Is having bi-polar a death sentence? I thought medications will make you okay. My friend was just diagnosed and I am confused. Is mental illness a silent killer?**

Bipolar is not a "death sentence" or a "silent killer." Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness, is a brain disorder that causes unusual shifts in mood, energy, activity levels, and the ability to carry out day-to-day tasks. These moods range from periods of extremely "up," elated, and energized behavior (known as



manic episodes) to very sad, “down,” or hopeless periods (known as depressive episodes).

The key to living well with bipolar disorder is obtaining services and supports when needed, which may include therapy/counseling, support from peers with lived experience and therapeutic/medication management. Medications help to control symptoms resulting from bipolar disorder and many individuals with bipolar disorder return to a fully functional level between episodes. Therapy and medication treatments are used to stabilize individuals who suffer from mental health disorders. To ensure a healthy and productive lifestyle, continue to provide support and encourage individuals to continue with medications and therapy.

There are many educational resources available about how the disorder affects the individual and how you can support your friend. To access more information about Bipolar Disorders, visit the links below:

1. International Society for Bipolar Disorders: <http://www.isbd.org/>
2. National Institute of Mental Health: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>
3. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment/mental-disorders>

**Please have more sessions on families and their stories and any successes they can share. I would like to know how they cope on a daily basis with mental health. It does not seem like this is ever addressed. I would like to see more sessions on this for all age groups.**

The department assists the Family Café to identify topics and presenters for the behavioral health track at the annual conference. We will focus next year on presentations that include family success stories, with presentations by families as a priority and presentations that address all age groups.

Support from other families with lived experience and knowledge of how to cope and navigate systems is often the most helpful. Family-run organizations such as The Family Café and the Federation of Families provide support and information about each and can be accessed at the links below:

1. Federation of Families: <http://familyorgdirectory.fmhi.usf.edu/viewOrg.cfm?orgID=41>
2. The Family Café: <http://www.familycafe.net/>
3. National Alliance on Mental Illness: <http://www.nami.org/>
4. Florida Department of Children and Families: Personal Stories: The Impact of Treatment: <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/substance-abuse/get-help>

Thank you for your suggestions. They are very helpful in planning for next year. Please submit any additional ideas or recommendations you have regarding specific topics or presenters to the Family Café. Planning for next year is already underway.

**Can you tell me what PBS is? Is it a service I can access? Can you tell me about eligibility requirements?**

PBS is a common acronym for Positive Behavior Support. PBS is not a service, but a common approach used by service providers in a variety of settings, to include the school system. PBS is a set of research-based strategies used to increase the quality of life and decrease problem behavior by teaching new skills and making changes in the person's environment. If you are interested in PBS, you can ask service providers if they use this approach and advocate for yourself to receive it. Information about PBS can be accessed at the following links:

1. Association for Positive Behavior Support:  
[http://www.apbs.org/new\\_apbs/genintro.aspx#definition](http://www.apbs.org/new_apbs/genintro.aspx#definition)
2. Medicaid Applied Behavior Analysis Service Providers:  
[http://www.fdhc.state.fl.us/medicaid/Operations/assistance/docs/Medicaid\\_Applied\\_Behavior\\_Analysis\\_Services\\_Providers.pdf](http://www.fdhc.state.fl.us/medicaid/Operations/assistance/docs/Medicaid_Applied_Behavior_Analysis_Services_Providers.pdf)
3. Florida Department of Education – Florida's Positive Behavior Support Project: <http://flpbs.fmhi.usf.edu/>

**Most of us have dual diagnosis and need intensive mental health services. You need to offer more educational sessions of mental health. And services are not offered as readily as they should be.**

The department assists the Family Café to identify topics and presenters for the behavioral health track at the annual conference. The behavioral health track at the conference this year included sessions addressing the needs of people who are dually diagnosed, which include two sessions offered by the department and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. We recognize the need to provide more educational information to individuals who are dually diagnosed and their families, and will focus on offering more session next year. To access additional information, please visit the websites below:

1. National Association for Persons with Developmental Disabilities and Mental Health Needs: <http://thenadd.org/resources/information-on-dual-diagnosis-2/>

If you would like to provide input on topics you would like to hear more about at the conference next year, please contact the Family Café. Planning for next year has already begun.

**Why are mental health issues not considered a disability issue? Having a mental health condition qualifies you for services. At least it does in the schools.**

Some mental health disorders are considered to be a disability and are recognized by the Social Security Administration (SSA) as such. Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Social Security Income (SSI) both provide needed financial assistance to many people in the United States who have mental health conditions. SSDI provides monthly income to individuals who are limited in their ability to work because of a physical or mental disability. Currently almost nine million individuals receive SSDI, and as of 2013, 35.2 percent of recipients qualify for disability based on a mental health condition. The SSA uses its own definitions of disability and its own diagnostic criteria for determining whether an individual has a certain disability.

Most private health insurance plans, Medicaid and Medicare cover qualifying mental health services, depending on the provider and treatment needed. To identify these mental health services, you should contact your health insurance provider. If you don't have insurance, you may find a mental health provider by visiting the websites below:

1. Agency for Healthcare Administration  
<http://www.floridahealthfinder.gov/facilitylocator/facloc.aspx>
2. Department of Children and Families facility locator:  
<http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/substance-abuse/get-help>

**There are so many children out there waiting to be adopted. How do I get the process started? Why doesn't DCF promote these type of adoptions?**

Thank you for your interest in adopting. Florida's Adoption Information Center provides adoption information and referral services to prospective adoptive parents, adoptive parents, adult adoptees, birth relatives, pregnant women and professionals. Please visit the Adoption Information Center at [adoptflorida.com](http://adoptflorida.com) or contact them at 1-800-96-Adopt to obtain contact information for the agency that completes adoptions in your specific area.

**If I got food stamps will it affect how much SSI I receive?**

No. Food assistance is a food benefit that cannot be used for any other purpose and is not redeemable or exchangeable for cash. The food assistance benefit

amount is not income and does not impact eligibility for SSI.

**How do I get mental health assistance for my child? Her doctor wants to prescribe many different drugs, but I do not agree. What is NAMI and can they help my family? Are there any groups I can talk to about the drugs the doctors want to prescribe?**

Mental health issues affect many children and their families. Children's mental health services are funded primarily by private insurance, Medicaid and the department. To find a mental health care provider in your community, you can contact your insurance provider or your child's Medicaid Managed Care plan, if they are enrolled in Medicaid. If your child is not enrolled in Medicaid and you do not have insurance, you can contact the Managing Entity (ME) in your community. The department contracts with MEs to manage the behavioral health system of care in local communities. Contact information for the ME in your community can be found at the department's website using the link below:  
<http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/substance-abuse/managing-entities>

The Florida KidCare program may be a resource for you. If you are in need of insurance coverage for your child, information about the program can be found at the following link: <http://www.floridakidcare.org/>

Parents and caregivers often have questions about medications being recommended for their children. Any medication, including over-the-counter and herbal remedies, may have negative as well as positive effects. Medications may have different effects on individuals based on age, stage of development, activity level, other health factors, and other medications the person is taking. Information about the safety, potential risks and benefits, and indicated uses of medication has expanded greatly in the last few years. Some helpful resources for parents are provided below.

1. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) <http://www.fda.gov/> is the source of the most up-to-date information about research regarding medications. To obtain additional information about medications and resources for families, please visit the following link: [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)
2. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry maintains a resource webpage for Families, which includes information about current clinical trials, commonly diagnosed conditions, and medication use. <http://www.aacap.org/cs/forFamilies>
3. The American Psychological Association: The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry maintains a resource for Families webpage, which includes information about current clinical trials, commonly diagnosed conditions, and medication use. <http://www.aacap.org/cs/forFamilies>

NAMI is the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a mental health organization designed to provide education and advocacy to raise awareness of mental illnesses. The organization provides updated information pertaining to mental health issues along with offering support and assistance. NAMI can also provide information about the effects of medications. Additional information can be obtained from visiting the NAMI website at the following link:  
<http://www.nami.org/>

**I went to the pre-conference for mental health and want to know more about developing a sustainable family run organization.**

The Department of Children and Families recently received a federal award for a Children's Mental Health System of Care Expansion and Sustainability Project (SOC Project). A major goal of this Project is to empower and create opportunities for families and youth to impact their behavioral health care. Increasing the number of sustainable family- and youth-run organizations statewide is one way this project will achieve this goal. To learn more about developing a sustainable family run organization, you may contact the SOC Project Director and she will connect you to your local children's mental health system of care coordinator. Dr. Qasimah Boston, SOC Project Director may be reached by email at: [Qasimah.Boston@myflfamilies.com](mailto:Qasimah.Boston@myflfamilies.com). She can be reached by phone at: 850-717-4435.

**I would like to know more about services that are available to those who have mental health conditions/concerns. What can the SOC or the managing entities do to provide services. I get the idea of having all series with one area – just where is that area?**

The Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health is housed within the Florida Department of Children and Families and serves as the single state agency for the provision of mental health and substance abuse services. The department contracts with seven Managing Entities (MEs) statewide to manage the delivery of behavioral health services within their specific region through a network of local providers.

Through the MEs and local providers, Florida offers an array of behavioral health services depending on the severity of the condition and an individual's needs. These services include crisis stabilization, inpatient hospitalization, residential treatment, outpatient therapy, medication management, day treatment, clubhouse services, assertive community treatment and recovery support. For more information about Florida's mental health system of care, you can visit this link to see a list of Florida's MEs and the counties they serve:

[http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/substance-abuse/managing-entities\\_](http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/substance-abuse/managing-entities_)

Additionally, the Agency for Healthcare Administration provides a list of facilities that provide mental health services:

<http://www.floridahealthfinder.gov/facilitylocator/facloc.aspx>

**You should have mental health trainings for the police officers and other first responders. This is a must and should be offered as a community service.**

The Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health offers several online courses to enhance the skills of law enforcement officers and other professionals who interact with individuals that are mentally ill or suffering from substance use disorders. One course in particular, the "Florida Baker Act and Marchman Act Procedures for Law Enforcement," focuses on the roles and responsibilities of law enforcement officers in the conduct of their duties relating to managing situations that result from substance abuse or mental health crises. These courses can be found at the following link:

<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/samh/mentalhealth/training/bacourses.shtml>

In addition to offering online courses, we are in the process of establishing a crisis services coordinator position that will provide ongoing technical assistance to law enforcement and other agencies that interact with individuals experiencing mental health emergencies.

**Foster Care and Adoption: I would like to be a foster or adoptive parent. How do I go about signing up to be one? I cannot take care of more than one child at a time, but I can take care of one!**

Thank you for your interest in adopting. Florida's Adoption Information Center provides adoption information and referral services to prospective adoptive parents, adoptive parents, adult adoptees, birth relatives, pregnant women and professionals. Please visit the Adoption Information Center at [adoptflorida.org](http://adoptflorida.org) or contact them at 1-800-96-Adopt to obtain contact information for the agency that completes adoptions in your specific area.

**My ex-husband had someone call DCF on him and his child as he was not providing a good environment for the child. DCF should have and did arrive! This is a good thing! Now he is mad at ME because he thinks I had DCF take his son and return him to his mother. No services were offered to the poor child, just a ride in the police car and an overnight stay at the**

**precinct. Why don't you at DCF series provide these "traumatized" kids with therapy, etc.? Poor kid is only 8. He is angry and confused. Dad told him it was me who told the police – NOT!**

It is true that being removed from a parent can be very traumatizing to a child.

When a child is released to another parent there may or may not be a dependency petition filed – in this case, involving the biological father. If a case manager determines the child needs counselling, such services are provided.

There is no formal dependency judicial intervention, the child's mother can contact Brevard Family Partnership at 321-752-4650 or 4659 and get information about programs that are available for her son and a list of therapists in the community who specialize in working with children. If the mother does not live in Brevard County, please provide me with her location and I will forward you information on the appropriate community-based care agency in her community.

**I so enjoyed hearing Kevin Hines. It felt good to know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Mental illness affects the young and the old alike. We need to be more aware. As I sat and listened with tears in my eyes I remembered my own son doing similar by ramming his car into the side of a bridge because his voices told him he was worthless and no good to anybody. Thank God he was one of the few that survived as well. We need more Kevin Hines' to make all of us aware that this illness is very real. Thank you for your awesome work as usual.**

Awareness and education are key to ensuring that those who need help get it. By passing on Kevin's story, you never know who may hear it and be saved by it.

# The Department of Education

## **Afterschool Programs**

### **Are there afterschool programs available for exceptional student education (ESE) students?**

Many 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) serve students with disabilities. In recent years, professional development opportunities have been offered to afterschool programming staff to better serve students with disabilities. For locations of the 21st CCLC access programs, go to the map at <http://florida21stcclc.usf.edu/index.php?map>.

### **Who decides what the discipline is for students who are disruptive, the school or the district?**

Policies regarding discipline are developed at the school district level. Effective discipline strategies focus on the source of the misbehavior and work with the student to change the behavior. Ideally, students with behavioral issues would be able to stay in school unless they pose a threat to themselves or others. Often students with behavioral issues are not fully engaged in school, and out-of-school discipline causes them to fall further behind academically.

Concerns about the effectiveness of a school district's discipline policy should be directed to the district office, usually the student services office.

### **What is the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) doing to address bullying in schools?**

FDOE is committed to preventing bullying in Florida schools and has dedicated resources for this purpose. The Office of Safe Schools provides technical assistance to districts on prevention, intervention and response to bullying behaviors. Additionally, there are approved bullying policies for every school district in Florida to ensure that it is comprehensive, accurate and reflects the mandates of the law.

The Office of Safe Schools annually monitors districts for compliance as outlined in section 1006.147, Florida Statutes (F.S.) and also maintains a website dedicated specifically to bullying. Schools and districts consult this website to obtain resources and information on bullying. We encourage you to explore this website at <http://www.fldoe.org/safeschools/bullying.asp>.



## **Student Services**

### **If I suspect my child has a disability what should I do?**

Either you or a school district may request an evaluation to determine if the student is a student with a disability. If your child is below grade-level expectations, the school should already be providing and monitoring interventions based on his academic and behavioral needs. The district has an obligation to request consent to conduct an evaluation whenever the district suspects that the student may be a student with a disability who needs special education. The student response to instruction and intervention data over time helps identify students “suspected” of being a student with a disability and needing special education services. A parent brochure explaining response to intervention (RtI) and special education evaluations is available on the Florida Response to Intervention website at <http://www.florida-rti.org/index.htm>.

You also have the right to request an initial evaluation at any time. When you request an evaluation, the district must either obtain consent or provide written notice of refusal within 30 calendar days (not including school holidays and breaks) (Rule 6A-6.0331(3)(c), Florida Administrative Code [F.A.C.]). A team of qualified professionals will determine the evaluation content based on the student’s school performance and RtI, and information provided by you. A full and individual evaluation would address all areas of concern and also identify the student’s strengths. If you wish to request an evaluation, contact the school counselor or ESE director in your district. Contact information for ESE directors is provided at <http://app4.fldoe.org/EESSContacts/>.

### **Why do schools not offer sex education classes for students with disabilities like schools do for students without disabilities?**

All students have access to health education classes, including students with disabilities. Section 1003.42(2)(n), F.S., requires comprehensive health education to be taught that addresses concepts of community health; consumer health; environmental health; family life, including an awareness of the benefits of sexual abstinence as the expected standard and the consequences of teenage pregnancy; mental and emotional health; injury prevention and safety; Internet safety; nutrition; personal health; prevention and control of disease; and substance use and abuse. The health education curriculum for students in Grades 7-12 shall include a teen dating violence and abuse component that includes, but is not limited to, the definition of dating violence and abuse, the warning signs of dating violence and abusive behavior, the characteristics of healthy relationships,

measures to prevent and stop dating violence and abuse, and community resources available to victims of dating violence and abuse.

Contact your school or district for specifics on health education classes.

### **Does FDOE have the exceptional family member program with the military in schools?**

More information is needed to provide you with information about this specific program. For more information please contact Curtis Jenkins, school counseling consultant, at 850-245-7851 or ctjenkins@usf.edu. Mr. Jenkins can assist you in contacting knowledgeable professionals about this and other military support programs.

### **Can school districts do an educational psychological evaluation? Can I pick the provider that completes the evaluation? Do I need to pay for it?**

The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal law, defines what type of evaluations are provided at the school district's expense. The local school district is responsible for conducting evaluations for students who are suspected of being a student with a disability and needing special education and related services. If there is reason to suspect that your child is a student with a disability, the school is required to conduct the evaluation at no cost to the family.

If you disagree with the school's evaluation, you may ask for an independent educational evaluation (IEE). The district is not obligated to pay for the cost of an IEE until the district has conducted its own evaluation. The school will provide you with a list of eligible evaluators and you can choose an evaluator from that list. If you believe that your child has a disability and needs exceptional student services, you may request an individual evaluation at any time. When you request an evaluation, the district has 30 calendar days (not including school holidays and breaks) to respond by obtaining parental consent to conduct the evaluation or by providing you with a written notice of refusal. The district must complete the evaluation within 60 calendar days (not including school holidays and breaks) after receiving written permission on the district consent form.

The types of services provided for eligible students are determined by a team based on the individual student's needs and documented on an individual educational plan (IEP). You can find information about the IDEA disability categories on the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services website at <http://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/ese-eligibility/>.

## **What is the process for obtaining an individual educational plan (IEP)? Do I have to wait until RtI is completed?**

If your child is having difficulty in school, the classroom teacher will try many ways to help your child be more successful. If the situation does not improve, you or the teacher may ask for help from a team of people at the school. You, as a parent, are part of that team. This team will help by planning and implementing interventions that are most likely to help your child, such as special teaching or behavior management strategies. The team will monitor your child's response to the interventions. The information gathered and used by the team to decide how well the interventions are working is called response to intervention (or RtI) data.

There may come a time during the RtI process when the team believes that your child is not making enough progress or when the intensity of support your child needs leads the team to suspect that your child might need ESE and related services. At that time, the team may suggest an additional evaluation to find out if your child qualifies for exceptional student education (ESE) services.

If you think your child has a disability and needs services, you may request an individual evaluation at any time. If you make the request yourself, write down the name of the person you spoke with and the date. It is best to make your request for an evaluation in writing and keep a copy of the letter.

You must give your written permission before your child can be individually evaluated. The school staff will ask you to sign a consent form giving your permission to conduct the evaluation. Once you have given your written permission for the initial evaluation, gathering information and evaluating your child should be done within 60 calendar days (not including school holidays and breaks).

After the evaluation is finished, the school will invite you to a special meeting, which is often called an eligibility staffing. At the meeting, the evaluators or other school staff will explain the evaluations and discuss the results with you. The team of people, including you, will determine if your child qualifies for ESE services. If your child qualifies for ESE services, a team, including you, will develop the IEP.

For additional questions related to ESE, you may contact your district ESE director, listed at <http://app4.fldoe.org/EESSContacts/>.

## **Should a parent have ample time to review the IEP and provide input?**

IDEA (Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations, section 300.321) is clear that you, as the parent of a child with a disability, should have a voice in all discussions and decisions about your child's education. Specifically, each school must take steps to ensure that you are present at each IEP team meeting or are afforded the opportunity to participate. This includes, notifying you of the meeting early enough to ensure that you will have an opportunity to attend and scheduling the meeting at a mutually agreed upon time and place.

If there are concerns related to a lack of time during an IEP meeting to review and discuss the IEP, you may contact your district parent liaison or district ESE director, listed at <http://app4.fl DOE.org/EESSContacts/>.

### **What is the protocol for a school-based problem to get solved?**

From time to time, you and the school staff may disagree about what is fair or needed for your child. The first step in solving a problem is to make sure that everyone understands the problem. It is often best to ask for a meeting when you do not understand something or think the school does not understand you.

Contact the following people in the order given:

- Your child's teacher,
- The principal of the school,
- Appropriate school staff to request an IEP meeting,
- The ESE administrator in the local school district office and
- The superintendent of the school district.

If you and the school district are still not able to agree about what is needed for your child, you may decide to ask for a facilitated IEP meeting or mediation, file a state complaint, or ask for a due process hearing. More information about the dispute resolution options, and the forms you need to complete, can be found online at <http://www.fl DOE.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/dispute-resolution/>.

## **Parent**

### **Could I please have more parent services for ESE students, such as ESE parent liaisons and a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)?**

Florida schools often have PTAs and school advisory councils that include parents of students with disabilities.

To find out what is offered specifically in your district and schools, or how to start an ESE advisory board, please contact a Florida Diagnostic and Resource System (FDLRS) ESE parent liaison to assist you at <http://www.fdlrs.org/>.

### **Specific Learning Disability (SLD)**

#### **How are students with an SLD going to receive a standard diploma because having so many remedial classes does not allow for physical education, art and other electives?**

All students with disabilities in Florida are now able to work toward a standard high school diploma, a credential that offers them many more opportunities after they leave high school than the special diploma did. The majority of students with disabilities will continue to earn their diploma using a high school graduation option, which is available to all students, but two additional high school graduation options available only to students with disabilities are also available. These are described in s. 1003.4282(10), F.S., and Rule 6A-1.09963(3) and (4), F.A.C. To view the rule, go to <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ruleNo.asp?id=6A-1.09963>.

Meeting general education standards to earn a standard diploma can be challenging for students with disabilities, as well as for their teachers and families. FDOE offers a large variety of resources and professional development to educators to provide them with techniques and strategies to help students with an SLD be successful. With appropriate accommodations and supports as listed on a student's IEP, practices such as universal design for learning and multi-tiered system of supports, it is possible for all students to earn a standard diploma. Students must participate in statewide standardized assessments; however, assessment results for students with disabilities may be waived by the IEP team under specific circumstances for the purpose of receiving a course grade and a standard high school diploma.

Regarding students with an SLD being unable to take electives, state legislation has been passed that removed the requirement for high school students who score Level 1 or Level 2 on English language arts Florida Standards Assessment, and Algebra 1 end of course exam be enrolled in intensive math and reading classes. If your child is not showing growth from these courses, you may wish to meet with the IEP team to discuss ways to improve your child's reading and math, which will also allow electives to fit into your child's schedule.

#### **Does FDOE have any information on students who are twice exceptional?**

The term twice exceptional refers to students who are gifted and who also have a disability. Consistent with the Federal Regulations for IDEA, gifted students may be determined eligible for services under IDEA if they: (1) do not achieve adequately based on chronological age or state-approved, grade-level standards and (2) do not make adequate progress as evidenced by their response to scientific, research-based interventions. For more information on eligibility see <http://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-5586/dps-2009-177.pdf>.

A list of resources about twice exceptional children can be found at [www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7690/urlt/BEESSWM82115.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7690/urlt/BEESSWM82115.pdf).

## **School Choice**

### **Is there information available on school choice? Specifically, what is the difference between the McKay scholarship and the Gardiner scholarship?**

While the McKay Scholarship has served our Florida communities as a means to assist students with disabilities and their families in paying tuition toward a private school, The Gardiner Scholarship was created to provide more options and flexibility. Unlike the McKay Scholarship, parents may use Gardiner scholarship funds while in a home education program or a private school to pay for services directly to eligible service providers, or to contribute to a Stanley G. Tate college savings account program. In order to qualify for this program a student must meet the following criteria:

- Is a resident of this state;
- Is eligible to enroll in kindergarten through Grade 12 in a public school in this state or will be 3 or 4 years old before September 1;
- Has a disability defined as autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, an intellectual disability, Phelan-McDermid syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, Williams syndrome or a high-risk child as defined in s. 393.063(23)(a), F.S.
- Has IEP written in accordance with rules of the State Board of Education or has received a diagnosis of a disability as defined above from a physician who is licensed under chapter 458 or chapter 459, or a psychologist who is licensed in Florida.

FDOE's School Choice website has information on eligibility criteria and important frequently asked questions for all of the state-funded scholarship programs including the McKay and Gardiner Scholarships. For more information, go to <http://fldoe.org/schools/school-choice/>. In addition to this valuable resource, you may also contact the School Choice office at 1-800-447-1636 with any additional questions.

## **College and State Universities**

### **Do colleges offer any programs for persons with disabilities?**

Students with disabilities are welcome at all Florida colleges. College students with documented disabilities are eligible to receive auxiliary aids and services, which may include services such as extended time on exams, texts in an alternative format, note-takers, and sign language interpreters.

In order to receive services, students must self-disclose their disability and register with the college's Office of Student Disability Services. Students in need of disability services must also present current documentation of their disability. Documentation requirements may vary across colleges and may also be different than the documents required by middle and high schools. Colleges recommend that students register as early as possible before the beginning of a semester in order to ensure accommodations are in place.

For specific documentation requirements, contact your local student disability services office at <http://data.fldoe.org/workforce/contacts/default.cfm?action=showList&ListID=40>.

## **Lottery**

### **Does the lottery still supply support to schools, including ESE?**

FDOE continues to receive funds from the Florida Lottery annually. The Florida Lottery provides a variable percentage of their gross revenue from online and instant lottery tickets, and deposits into the Educational Enhancement Trust Fund. FDOE then administers the funds from the trust to the 67 school districts for their use.

Districts have policies in place as to what the allocation is spent on. You can find more specific information on the allocations at <http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7507/urlt/0075945-lotbook.pdf>.

## **FDOE Emergency Management**

### **What are schools doing to ensure students are safe?**

Each school district is responsible for the safety of their schools and facilities. Districts are encouraged to work closely with local law enforcement and

government to coordinate training and emergency planning. For more specific information please contact your school district office.

## **Vision Impairment**

### **Are students in Grades K-12 allowed to bring a service dog to school?**

For helpful guidelines on the use of service animals for students with disabilities, go to FDOE's website at <http://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-7346/dps-2015-60a.pdf>. It is important to remember that schools are not mandated to "provide service animals for use, pay for, care for or train them, or otherwise ensure that an individual with disability has a service animal."

The only allowable reasons for denying a proper request for a service animal to attend school with a student with a disability or asking that a service animal be removed from school premises are: (1) the animal is out of control and the animal's handler does not take effective action to control it; (2) the animal is not housebroken; (3) the animal's presence poses a "direct threat" to the health or safety of others, based upon an individualized assessment; or (4) the animal's presence would constitute a "fundamental alteration" to the nature of the services, program or activity provided by the school."

Additionally, organizations that train and provide service animals (e.g., Guide Dogs for the Blind or Guide Dogs of America) usually ask that applicants for guide dogs have received orientation and mobility training and are experienced independent travelers prior to being trained to use a guide dog, so that both the dog and the human come with the necessary trainings for success.

### **What services does the Division of Blind Services (DBS) provide?**

DBS assists and empowers Floridians who are blind and visually impaired to achieve their goals and live their lives with independence and self-direction. We accomplish this by providing quality rehabilitation services to our clients of all ages through counseling and financial support for vocational training, job placement, training for adults in independent living skills, and services to children and families. Services are provided directly by our program staff, contract providers and community-based rehabilitation program partners.

Your child may be eligible to participate in our Children's Program. In this program, a DBS children's specialist works with the child, parents, local school district and other professionals to provide, training, guidance, information, referrals and advocacy throughout the child's elementary- and middle-school



years. This program acts as a supplement to the services already provided by the school system to foster a child's learning and ability to function independently. Parents of children in the program are provided with training opportunities to assist in understanding the impact of the visual impairment on various aspects of their child's life. Specific services include the following:

- Information about devices designed to maximize communication and computer skills for individuals with visual impairment,
- Training to assist parents in understanding the impact of the visual impairment on their child's education and independent living skills,
- Educating parents about their rights and responsibilities in the development of the child's IEP.

For more information or to apply for services please contact us at 800-342-1828 or visit [dbs.myflorida.com](http://dbs.myflorida.com).

### **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

#### **I would like to know more about available behavioral therapies for students with ASD.**

Behavioral therapies are provided within the school districts based on the individual needs of the student as documented on the student's IEP; however for individuals with a medical diagnosis of ASD, you may contact the following resources:

- Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities: <http://florida-card.org/>.
- Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System-Multi-disciplinary Center: <http://www.fdlrs.org/>.

### **Hospital or Homebound**

#### **If my child is a student in the hospital or homebound program and will be in the hospital for three months, will educational services be provided?**

Hospital or homebound is defined as a student who has a medically diagnosed physical or psychiatric condition that is acute or catastrophic in nature, or a chronic illness, or a repeated intermittent illness due to a persisting medical problem and which confines the student to home or hospital and restricts activities for an extended period of time.

Services are based on what the IEP team, which you are a part of, decides. You may want to contact your district's hospital or homebound coordinator at your

local district's ESE office at  
[https://app2.fldoe.org/publicapps/Schools/schoolmap/flash/schoolmap\\_text.asp](https://app2.fldoe.org/publicapps/Schools/schoolmap/flash/schoolmap_text.asp).

Additional resources are as follows:

- Hospital/Homebound Program and Services, Policy and Procedures Manual: <http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7590/urlt/hhppm08.pdf>
- Rule 6A-6.03020, F.A. C., Specially Designed Instruction for Students Who Are Homebound or Hospitalized: <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ruleNo.asp?id=6A-6.03020>

## **Transition**

### **Can an ESE student stay at school past the age of 18? Can they drop out?**

Both federal and state laws provide for a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities, who have not earned a standard diploma, through the age of 21. Therefore, if your child earns a special diploma or a standard diploma and defers receipt of the diploma, as described in Rule 6A-1.09963, F.A.C., your child can receive services through 21. For more information about the rule, go to <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ruleNo.asp?id=6A-1.09963>. Exactly when services end is decided by the school district. Some school districts end services on the 22nd birthday, others at the end of the semester in which the student turns 22, and others at the end of school year in which the student turns 22. This decision is based on the school district's policy in their ESE Policy and Procedures, which can be found on the bureau website at <http://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/monitoring/ese-policies-procedures-spp.stml>.

Arrangements for your child's continued services should be discussed at least yearly at your child's IEP meeting. School districts offer a wide variety of programs for students who are aged 18-22. You and your child need time to review all options and choose the best program. With your consent, outside agencies, such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) or the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, should be included in the discussion, if they will be assisting in providing services after high school.

If you believe that your child is not competent to make decisions, you can take steps to become their guardian. This may require hiring a lawyer and going to court. A member of your IEP team or a school representative should be able to provide you with local contact information and offices that offer assistance in this matter. The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council provides a publication that may be helpful called *Lighting the Way to Guardianship and Other Decision Making*

*Alternatives: A Manual for Individuals and Families*, which can be found at [http://www.fddc.org/sites/default/files/file/publications/Guardianship%20Family%20Manual\\_0.pdf](http://www.fddc.org/sites/default/files/file/publications/Guardianship%20Family%20Manual_0.pdf).

### **What is available for ESE students that want to go to college?**

Currently, several universities and state colleges have transition and postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities (TPSID) programs. TPSID programs are designed to support students with intellectual disabilities who seek to continue academic, career and technical, and independent living instruction at an institution of higher education. Additional information is available at the Florida Consortium on Postsecondary Education and Intellectual Disabilities' website at <http://www.fltpsid.info/>.

In addition, section 1004.6495, F.S., the Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program Act, established the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities at the University of Central Florida. The center will administer \$8 million in funding to increase program options, and to provide funding for students with intellectual disabilities attending Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs). For more information, go to <http://fcsua.org/>.

### **Who decides what type of a diploma my child will receive, the school or the parent?**

The IEP team, which includes you, the parent, and the student, determines which high school graduation option is the most appropriate, using the postsecondary education and career goals of the student to guide the decision. The diploma decision may be revisited at any time, and students may move between options. This is not a decision determined solely by the school, it is a collaborative team decision. S. 1003.4282, F.S., states that a parent of the student with a disability shall, in collaboration with the IEP team during the transition planning process pursuant to s. 1003.5716, F.S., declare an intent for the student to graduate from high school with either a standard high school diploma or a certificate of completion. For more information on this statute, go to [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?mode=View%20Statutes&SubMenu=1&App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=1003.4282&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.4282.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?mode=View%20Statutes&SubMenu=1&App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=1003.4282&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.4282.html).

### **What work is being done to prepare ESE students for life after high school, college readiness, employment training and vocational training?**

In the past few years there has been an increase in the number of students with disabilities who were employed or continuing their education after they left high school. To ensure that progress continues to be made in this area, it is very important that IEP teams begin discussing post-high school options for students with disabilities at a young age. As programs vary by district, you and your child should explore early in your child's high school years, the specific programs in your district. Recent initiatives and legislation, including the following, are expanding options for students with disabilities all across the state:

- Florida is an Employment First state. Employment First is both a philosophy and policy, and means that employment is the first option for all individuals, including those with significant disabilities. For information on Employment First, go to <http://www.employmentfirstfl.org/>. Employers and individuals with disabilities can get information from the Abilities Work Web Portal at <https://abilitieswork.employflorida.com/vosnet/Default.aspx>.
- Career and Technical Education courses are available in high school. Section 1003.4282, F.S., provides two new options for students with disabilities to earn a standard diploma, including one option for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Both options allow students to substitute career technical education (CTE) courses for other required courses, offering them the opportunity to learn occupational skills. For more information, go to <https://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2016/1003.4282>.
- The Workforce Investment Opportunity Act provides opportunities for students to access pre-employment transition services including vocational assessment, career exploration, work readiness training and work experience through VR. To visit the VR website, go to <http://www.rehabworks.org/>.
- The Center for Unique Abilities at the University of Central Florida has been created to expand the number of CTPs throughout Florida. CTPs are extended transition programs at colleges, universities and CTEs that provide students with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to continue academic, employment and independent living skills attainment to help prepare them for employment. Institutions may receive up to \$300,000 each to start programs and students may receive up to \$7,000 in scholarships each year to attend.
- High School High Tech, a program of the Able Trust, provides high school students with all types of disabilities the opportunity to explore jobs or postsecondary education leading to technology-related careers.
- Project Search is an extended transition program available for students with disabilities to learn transferable employment skills. The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council is offering funding to expand Project Search throughout the state. For more information on Project Search, go to <http://www.projectsearch.us/>.

# The Department of Health

## **How can I get a special car seat for my child with special needs: Can it be included on the Family Support Plan?**

Assistive devices, such as special car seats, are authorized when necessary to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of the child. Individualized Family Support Plan teams determine whether a device is needed to enhance the child's current development and functioning. Please discuss your request with your Individualized Family Support Plan team.

## **It seems more and more necessary supports are being decreased by Early Steps . . . why is that?**

Early Steps services are individualized based on the developmental needs of the eligible infant or toddler. Any decision to increase or decrease services to a particular child is made based on the child's status and needs. Please discuss your child's services with your Individualized Family Support Plan team.

## **What is being done to pass legislation which forces insurance companies to provide speech and other needed therapies in the natural environment setting?**

The Early Steps program understands that infants and toddlers learn best through everyday experiences and interactions in natural settings. Early Steps responds to inquiries from members, committees, or staff of the legislature, providing information related to the benefits of early intervention services in natural environments, whenever asked. Only registered lobbyists may attempt to influence legislative action.

## **As far as Early Steps providers are concerned, is the credential process still taking as long and are providers being paid in a timely fashion? We cannot afford to lose any good providers due to lack of payments!**

Early Steps has reviewed provider credentialing and provider payment timelines. Although both are now occurring within required timeframes, timeliness remains a priority for the Early Steps Program. If providers have questions concerning their provider application or payments, please contact the provider relations liaison in

the local Early Steps office. Early Steps' goal is that provider-related issues not impact services to children and families.

**Early Steps question: All the research shows brain development happens in the first three years of a child's life. If a child shows significant delays when evaluated, why do some have to wait for services? Also funding has decreased over the years, but need goes up. Why?**

Once a parent consents to Early Steps services, the program will assist by identifying a provider most appropriate to meet the needs of the infant or toddler, and the family. This includes coordinating schedules together with the parent and will not take more than 30 days. Funding for the program has increased over the past two years due to increases in state and federal appropriations.

**Can you explain why not all the MMA plans are providing the same level of services as they are supposed to? And what about CMS as a MMA Plan? Can a family sign up?**

All MMA plans must cover the same basic Medicaid services. If you have concerns about a particular MMA plan, you may complete the online complaint form created by the Agency for Health Care Administration to provide expedited handling: [http://apps.ahca.myflorida.com/smmc\\_cirts/](http://apps.ahca.myflorida.com/smmc_cirts/). You may also contact a Medicaid representative by phone at 1-877-254-1055

The first step to being eligible for the Children's Medical Services Managed Care Plan (CMS Plan) is to qualify financially for Medicaid or Florida KidCare. Valuable information is available at <http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>

The second step is a clinical screening. Please visit <http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/childrens-health/cms-plan/eligibility-and-services/index.html>

Also, see below from our website:

Children's Medical Services Managed Care Plan is designed for those individuals who are Medicaid eligible and have special health care needs.

How does a child qualify?

- Must meet Medicaid financial requirements
- Must be under age 21
- Must meet CMS clinical screening requirements or have a physician attest to child's qualifying medical conditions

### **How do I request a clinical eligibility screening or rescreening?**

To request a CMS Plan clinical eligibility screening, please contact CMS at 1-855-901-5390. If you have already participated in a screening and would like to request a rescreening, please contact CMS at 1-855-901-5390. You may request a rescreening at any time.

**I am going to have to quit my job or get a divorce in order for my son to get needed services. This is not fair! We have to choose between keeping our family together and getting her the services she needs. We currently receive services by CMS. What a nice place to go!**

Children's Medical Services Managed Care Plan (CMS Plan) is happy to assist and needs more information to do so. We will reach out to you at the email address provided. You may also contact the CMS Plan at [cmsplan@flhealth.gov](mailto:cmsplan@flhealth.gov) and provide your phone number and county.

**I still have many concerns about CMS becoming a managed care program. If families did not pick and sign up for a provider, they were assigned one. These new providers do not know our children and we have to go through the history all over again and services may not all be standardized across all MMA's. How is DOH/CMS working to fix this mess?**

The role of a primary care provider (PCP) is an important one. All MMA plans are required to assign each member a PCP if one has not already been chosen. However, you may change your PCP at any time by contacting the Member Services toll-free line for your health plan. Information is provided in your Member Handbook and on the back of your plan ID card. For your area, the Children's Medical Services Managed Care Plan member services number is 1-866-209-5022.

**The Early Steps Program is facing challenges to get needed services out to the Latino families due to lack of providers who are bilingual and unwillingness to provide services in natural environments. What can be done in terms of policy to increase the number of bilingual professionals to meet the growing demand? This is especially true in South Florida.**

Local Early Steps programs recruit and hire providers and staff who are capable of communicating with children and families in their homes and communities. It is both a federal and state requirement that early intervention services be provided

in the native language of families. Please reach out to your service coordinator and Individualized Family Support Plan team to discuss your services.

**I am an employee of the Department of Corrections. With my current salary I would not qualify for my son to be eligible for KidCare. It is because I am a state employee. What if I cannot afford the insurance offered to me by my health plan? How and what do you suggest I do DOH people?**

Section 409.814, Florida Statutes, establishes the eligibility requirements for the KidCare program. While you may not be eligible for a subsidized KidCare option, Florida Healthy Kids offers full-pay options for families with higher family incomes. Florida Healthy Kids is just one Florida KidCare partner and covers children 5-18. You can apply for Florida Healthy Kids coverage at <https://www.healthykids.org/application/> or by calling 1-888-540-KIDS (5437) to ask that an application be mailed to you.

Certain State of Florida employees, retirees and their dependents are eligible to participate in the benefits offered under the State Group Insurance Program. The MyBenefits website provides information about health insurance and other programs for prospective, current, and retired State of Florida employees.

**The switch in Healthy Kids to Sunshine Health was horrific. What a nightmare. I do hope the system doesn't do that again. How long can young people stay on that program? Do things change at 18 years of age with CMS?**

Florida Healthy Kids is just one Florida KidCare partner and covers children 5-18. The Florida KidCare program is made up of Florida Healthy Kids, Medicaid, MediKids and Children's Medical Services Managed Care Plan.

If your child is enrolled in Healthy Kids, s/he could lose coverage upon reaching 19 years of age. For more information, please contact your health plan or you may contact Florida Healthy Kids at 1-888-540-KIDS (5437).

**What kind of help or options are being created to help working parents to take care of children with disabilities regarding income resources?**

If you are enrolled in the Children's Medical Services Managed Care Plan (CMS Plan), your CMS nurse care coordinator can assist you to identify local resources.



For further assistance, please contact your local CMS office. A listing of CMS offices is available on our website at [www.CMSPlanFlorida.gov](http://www.CMSPlanFlorida.gov).

If you are not enrolled in CMS Plan, your local Family Care Council may be able to assist you with identifying community resources. Family Care Councils (FCCs) are groups of volunteers who advocate for people with developmental disabilities and their families. You can find contact information for your local FCC online at <http://www.fccflorida.org/local-councils.html> or by calling 1-800-470-8101.

**Our son was dropped by CMS, because we have major medical insurance. We lost valuable CMS services because of this. How can this get changed?**

Children with special health care needs may become enrolled with the Children's Medical Services Managed Care Plan through one of two programs—Medicaid or KidCare.

It is common for Medicaid recipients to have one or more additional sources of coverage for health care services. Medicaid requires that these other sources pay part or all the costs for medical services provided under Medicaid. Any remaining costs for services provided under Medicaid will be covered by your Medicaid health plan.

KidCare is different. Section 409.814, Florida Statutes, establishes the eligibility requirements for the KidCare program. One program requirement is to not have any other health insurance coverage. There are some exceptions to this rule. Please contact the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation at 1-888-540-KIDS (5437) to reapply and to learn more about exceptions.

**Why wasn't there enough notice for families when they were terminated from CMS? Getting a letter that families with children with chronic illnesses is not family-centered, like CMS used to be.**

There are multiple reasons a child may be disenrolled from Children's Medical Services Managed Care Plan (CMS Plan). For instance, if the child turns age 19 for KidCare or age 21 for Medicaid and loses eligibility or if the child is no longer clinically eligible for CMS Plan. In each instance, the family should receive a letter in advance indicating the reason for disenrollment. If the disenrollment is due to loss of clinical eligibility, the family will also be contacted—by phone and letter—in advance by the CMS Plan nurse care coordinators who conduct annual re-evaluations.

If you would like more information, please visit our website at [www.CMSPlanFlorida.gov](http://www.CMSPlanFlorida.gov) or email us at [cmsplan@flhealth.gov](mailto:cmsplan@flhealth.gov).

**Would CMS or a spokesperson for Children’s Medical Services be available for questions about continuous care for Florida’s children?**

Yes. Children’s Medical Services Managed Care Plan will reach out to you at the email address provided. You may also contact us at [CMSPlan@flhealth.gov](mailto:CMSPlan@flhealth.gov) or 850-245-4200.

**It may be outside our area of expertise, professionals should be offered CEU’s. Classes for nurses and caretakers.**

The Florida Department of Health can offer CEUs (continuing education units) for licensed professionals. When trainings are offered by the Florida Department of Health that may qualify for CEUs, the instructors may apply to the Department to have CEUs approved. The Florida Department of Health Public Health Practice Unit also offers trainings, such as Prevention of Medical Errors, Domestic Violence, and Laws & Rules for Nursing, which are all legislatively mandated courses for many professionals.

**It is very distressing when a developmentally disabled person must be admitted to the hospital and hospital staff is not educated on how to provide the specialized care these individuals need. Most times there are no funds available for caregiver support. These people are served food but cannot feed themselves so they go hungry. How can hospitals get away with this when they have funds in reserve (charity type)? Why do the appropriate state level entities not take steps to alleviate this problem?**

The Agency for Health Care Administration, Division of Health Quality Assurance protects Floridians through oversight of health care providers. If you wish to file a complaint against a licensed health care facility regulated by the Agency for Health Care Administration, please contact the Agency at 1-888-419-3456 / 800-955-8771 Florida Relay Service (TDD number) or use the Agency’s online complaint form at <https://apps.ahca.myflorida.com/hcfc/>. You may also submit a complaint using the Florida Department of Health’s Florida Health Care Complaint Portal at [www.flhealthcomplaint.gov](http://www.flhealthcomplaint.gov).

**Why does it take one entire year to get anything on the Cystic Fibrosis Med Waiver? I already went to Tallahassee and the Governor's office to complain and nothing helps!**

The purpose of the Medicaid Adult Cystic Fibrosis (ACF) Waiver is to promote, maintain, and restore the health and functional ability of eligible recipients and to minimize the effects of illness and disability to delay or prevent hospitalization or institutionalization. The ACF Waiver is designed so that individuals with ACF receive services that enable them to remain in the community and minimize the risk for hospitalization. For information on how to apply for the ACF Waiver or to inquire about your application status, contact the Department of Health, Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Program Central Registry toll free number 1-800-342-0778.

**As a single mom who cannot afford internet, what do I do? Going to the library to use the computer is hard. We live off fixed low income of \$900 a month including SSI.**

If you are enrolled in the Children's Medical Services Managed Care Plan (CMS Plan), your CMS nurse care coordinator can assist you to identify local resources. For further assistance, please contact your local CMS office at 850-484-5040 or toll-free at 1-800-381-3685.

If you are not enrolled in CMS Plan, your local Family Care Council may be able to assist you with identifying community resources. Family Care Councils (FCCs) are groups of volunteers who advocate for people with developmental disabilities and their families. You can find contact information for your local FCC online at <http://www.fccflorida.org/local-councils.html> or by calling 1-800-470-8101.

# **The Division of Emergency Management**

**My baby girl has many significant disabilities. She requires round the clock care by either her dad, many caregivers, or myself. My biggest fear is a disaster of any type. This means our family would have to be separated at the most crucial time . . . time of an emergency or disaster. This is really not a question, but a desire for us to, in case of a terrible emergency or other disaster, either weather related or man-made, to be able to stay together as a family. Please consider these options when you create your plans of evacuation throughout the state.**

Thank you for your question. Your situation is not unlike those of many families around Florida who want the best for their families, especially in an emergency. That is why we encourage all families to develop their family emergency preparedness plan and practice it with the entire family. You can start yours today by visiting [FLGetAPlan.com](http://FLGetAPlan.com).

**You know you teach and talk to your kids not to give our names or address or the names and addresses of any family member to strangers. So this is what you tell them, then something happens and you need your kids to talk to strangers and give them the information, names and locations of where you live. What a world we live in.**

Thank you for your comment. We encourage families to make an emergency plan that works for them. You can utilize the planning tool at [www.FLGetAPlan.com](http://www.FLGetAPlan.com) to make sure your family knows where they would go and what they would need in the event of an emergency, as well as to have the important phone numbers of emergency officials within their community.

**I really like the hands on materials for disaster kit preparation. This is really something to promote for others and those in school. You have helped us to prepare and plan!**

I am so glad to hear you have been able to use the materials and that they helped you to be better prepared! Please do not forget to visit [www.KidsGetAPlan.com](http://www.KidsGetAPlan.com) to find games, stories and activities to help you prepare all while having fun!

**Have any new or updated plans been established to get us to the shelters? Evacuation years ago was a total mess! I know it has been awhile, but do**

**you ever think of having a registry of those with disabilities within the community that you know of so in case of an emergency you would be able to reach out to them? My son is on 6 daily meds that keep him seizure free, able to function and in generally good health. If we were ever in a situation that turned into a terrible situation, I do not know what or where to go. My worst fear. No control, no options and now no help!**

Call Highlands County Office of Emergency Management at 863-385-1112 or visit [FLGetAPlan.com](http://FLGetAPlan.com). They can provide information about signing up for the Special Needs Registry. In the meantime, you can prevent the confusion by developing a family preparedness plan. Visit [FLGetAPlan.com](http://FLGetAPlan.com) today to complete your plan and learn more about how you and your family can be prepared in an emergency.

**There is a lot of talk about weather emergencies and natural weather disasters. What type of plan do we endorse or provide training to for man-made disasters or conditions?**

The Florida Division of Emergency Management uses the Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan as the guidebook to respond to any emergency, natural or man-made, across the state of Florida. Your family emergency plan should be much the same, taking into account actions you can take to prepare you and your family should you need to shelter in place at your home, or evacuate to a safe location. Go to [www.FLGetAPlan.com](http://www.FLGetAPlan.com) to start your family emergency plan today.

**Tell me more about establishing or signing up for a special needs registry?**

The Statewide Special Needs Registry helps counties plan for additional needs that residents may have during times of emergency. Call the Okaloosa County Office of Emergency Management at 850-651-7150 or visit [www.FLGetAPlan.com](http://www.FLGetAPlan.com) to register today.

**Since the beginning of this decade, we have not had a major hurricane or tropical disturbance that has "harmed" our state. We feel a little "bullet proof" when it comes to our weather conditions. Tell me that our state is prepared to continue services.**

Florida is one of the best prepared states in the country and participates in regular trainings and exercises to assure a robust response in an emergency. For more information on how your county is prepared for an emergency, please call the Okaloosa County Office of Emergency Management at 850-651-7150.

# The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

**Can you believe that VR serves more families than APD? I was so surprised to learn this . . . wow!**

Below are some of the differences between Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD).

VR	APD
Mission: To help people with all types of disabilities find and maintain employment and enhance their independence.	Mission: The Agency supports persons with Developmental Disabilities in living, learning, and working in their communities.
Serves people with all types of disabilities who have barriers to employment and want to work.	Serves people with seven (7) specific types of developmental disabilities.
Employment can only be in competitive integrated settings.	Employment can be in the community or in a sheltered workshop setting where customers can be paid subminimum wages or by the piece.

**What is this Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)? I missed the session, yet I would like to learn more about the services that are offered.**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is the first major reform to job training programs in more than 15 years.

WIOA improves access to job training and education opportunities for individuals with disabilities, out-of-school and at-risk youth, youth in foster care or young adults who have aged out of foster care, formerly incarcerated individuals, and others.

WIOA helps job seekers and workers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market. It also helps match employers with skilled workers. WIOA improves services to individuals with disabilities' access to high-quality workforce services to prepare them for competitive integrated employment. It requires better employer engagement and promotes physical and programmatic accessibility to employment and training services.

WIOA includes information pertaining to Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to youth with disabilities in school without requiring them to apply for VR services or be found eligible for VR services.

VR is in the process of offering new services authorized by the law, particularly to students with disabilities. The core services are career assessment and counseling, workplace readiness training, engagement in multiple work experiences, and postsecondary education counseling to students. Additional program and services are available to those students who do apply and are found eligible for VR services.

VR has a Transition Youth program. Transition specific information may be found at <http://rehabworks.org/stw.shtml>. In this webpage, you will find helpful videos, links, and resources to explore.

If you are residing in Florida and you are interested in applying for VR services, visit VR online at [www.RehabWorks.org](http://www.RehabWorks.org) to identify a VR office near you.

**What does it take to change my VR counselor? She does not get back to me, and I need more assistance with my job search.**

VR customers may request a change of counselor at any time. VR customers are encouraged speak to their counselor's supervisor. Making contact and sharing concerns will ensure specific points are heard and followed up on. If adequate progress has not been made after the initial contact, you may request a change for another counselor.

To request a change, contact your counselor's supervisor or the Ombudsman office at [ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org](mailto:ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org) or (866) 515-3692 (toll free).

**Can VR help me learn how to drive? I have a physical limitation and need some equipment to learn how to drive independently.**

VR may provide rehabilitation technology services, including driving training to eligible individuals, if they are necessary to achieve an employment outcome.

**Can you help me to buy an accessible van? Mine is currently 15 years old with over 230K miles. I need it to get to work, and feed my family.**

VR provides appropriate rehabilitation technology services including consultation with a rehabilitation engineer (RE) that is necessary for the applicant or eligible

individual to participate in DVR services, assessments or achievement of an employment outcome. When the counselor determines that vehicle modifications may be necessary, the counselor will make a referral to the RE. The RE consultation should occur prior to the selection of the vehicle, or purchase of any Driver Rehabilitation Specialist (DRS) services.

The individual is responsible to purchase a suitable vehicle recommended by the rehabilitation engineer (RE).

For additional information, regarding vehicle modification please visit us online at [www.rehabworks.org](http://www.rehabworks.org) and click on Counselor Policy Manual, Chapter 14, Section 14.07.

**I missed the session on Work Opportunities and the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act. Can you supply me handouts? Or better yet, give me an overview of the act?**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is the first major reform to job training programs in more than 15 years.

WIOA improves access to job training and education opportunities for individuals with disabilities, out-of-school and at-risk youth, youth in foster care or young adults who have aged out of foster care, formerly incarcerated individuals, and others.

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VR has a Transition Youth program. Transition specific information may be found at <http://rehabworks.org/stw.shtml>. In this webpage, you will find helpful videos, links, and resources to explore.

If you are residing in Florida and you are interested in applying for VR services, visit VR online at [www.RehabWorks.org](http://www.RehabWorks.org) to identify a VR office near you.

**Vocational Rehabilitation services should be offered in high school. I mean, I wish that I knew what I know now from learning about VR and what you all do. Thank you to the lady who spoke at the event during the session. She was informative and delightful to talk to. I learned so much. You should be telling us about VR before our kids get out of high school. I wish I would have known about the VR sooner.**

We are glad you enjoyed the VR presentation and found it informative. VR is working closely with Florida's School Districts to make sure families and youth with disabilities are receiving information about VR services and programs.

For more information about VR Transition Youth services for high school students you may visit our website at <http://rehabworks.org/stw.shtml>.

**The boss lady of VR talked with me and my family for quite a bit on Friday. I want to let her know that we appreciated the contacts she told us about.**

Thank you so much! Director McKinlay is always happy to participate in Family Café events and meet wonderful people like you. If you should ever need assistance in the future, please feel free to contact VR's Ombudsman's Office. The Ombudsman's Office can be reached at [ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org](mailto:ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org) or (866) 515-3692 (toll free).

**VR needs to be more responsive to folks who never worked, and will probably have a challenge or two in securing a job. Teach us how to complete a job application, interview, and dress for the job.**

VR's mission is to help individuals with disabilities find and maintain employment as well as enhance their independence. VR provides employment services to individuals needing assistance in developing or reestablishing skills, attitudes, personal characteristics, interpersonal skills, work behaviors and functional capabilities in order to help them become employed. Therefore, this job readiness training includes preparing resumes or job applications interviewing skills and how

to dress for an interview, as well as providing instruction in work place expectations. For example: getting along with co-workers/boss, being reliable and on time, filling out paperwork such as time sheets. VR may provide job skills training or education that are required by employers. Some examples are basic computer skills, customer service, and other office skills.

VR developed an Information and Referral Resources guide to help address some of the barriers that are keeping individuals from becoming employed and prepare them for employment (not all resources will apply to you). It includes various links to external websites that will help maximize your readiness to work and to help you get a job. For example, information to help you prepare a resume and current references or to help you prepare answers to common interview questions. The resource guide can be found at <http://rehabworks.org/docs/WaitingListResourceGuide.pdf>

**Thank you for the session with Director of VR. It was informative. I still need to know who to reach out to though with additional questions if I need to. Who would this be? I did not get her contact information. Thank you again for a great session.**

We are glad to hear you found Ms. Aleisa McKinlay's session informative. She is always happy to participate in Family Café events and meet wonderful people like you. The best way to have your concern address or any additional questions is to reach out to the local VR office. To identify the VR office near you, please visit VR online at [www.RehabWorks.org](http://www.RehabWorks.org) or call 1-800-451-4237 (Voice/TDD).

If you are residing in Florida and you are interested in applying for VR services, any of the VR counselors will be able to assist.

For job-related services, you may want to contact the Department of Economic Opportunity at [www.employflorida.com](http://www.employflorida.com)

**We are getting older and living longer. Does the state plan assist with working with seniors? Do you assist with needed accommodations for the workplace? I retired, but still need to work to make the ends meet. I need assistance due to my years of working and losing my family business and all my worldly possessions due to a stroke. My rehabilitation has been long. Much longer than expected.**

VR's mission is to help people with disabilities find and maintain employment and enhance their independence. Age does not exclude any individual who meets the basic eligibility requirements for vocational rehabilitation services. Individuals

must be available and legally permitted to join the labor market prior to eligibility determination.

VR may provide worksite modifications to eligible individuals if the accommodations are required to achieve the employment outcome.

For additional information, please feel free to contact your local VR Office. To find the VR office near you, visit us online at [www.RehabWorks.org](http://www.RehabWorks.org) or call 1-800-451-4237 (Voice/TDD).

If you are interested in applying for VR services, any of the VR counselors will be able to assist.

**What are the qualifications of getting VR services? I have an IEP, and graduated (special education) with diploma. Got my GED and now I need to know how to get a job. I have been putting out resumes everywhere, but I think I need a trade job. My mom says so. How can I get one?**

All VR services are individualized based on each individual's needs. Any person living in Florida who has a physical or mental impairment may apply for VR services. Below are the qualifications for VR eligibility.

If you reside in Florida, you may be eligible for VR services if our goal is to become employed and:

- Your physical or mental disability interferes with your ability to get or keep a job, and
- You need VR's help to prepare for, get, or keep a job.

VR provides employment services to individuals needing assistance in developing or reestablishing skills, attitudes, personal characteristics, interpersonal skills, work behaviors and functional capabilities in order to help them become employed. Therefore, this job readiness training includes preparing resumes or job applications interviewing skills and how to dress for an interview, as well as providing instruction in work place expectations. For example: getting along with co-workers/boss, being reliable and on time, filling out paperwork such as time sheets. VR may provide job skills training or education that are required by employers. Some examples are basic computer skills, customer service, and other office skills.

If you are interested in applying for VR services, visit VR online at [www.RehabWorks.org](http://www.RehabWorks.org) or call 1-800-451-4237 (Voice/TDD) to identify the VR office near you.

The best way to have any concern addressed or if you have any questions is to reach out to the local VR office. Any of the VR counselors will be able to assist.

Your eligibility will be determined within 60 days after you apply for services, unless circumstances beyond VR's control prevent or delay the decision.

If you receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for your disability, you are presumed eligible for VR services, if you plan to become employed.

For job-related services, you may want to contact the Department of Economic Opportunity at [www.employflorida.com](http://www.employflorida.com).



## The 18th Annual Family Café Report Card 2016

Attendees at The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café were given the opportunity to grade their experience on the following scale:

**A** = Excellent      **B** = Very Good      **C** = OK      **D** = Not So Good      **F** = Poor

The table below displays average grades for 2016, along with grades from the five previous years.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
I would give the Annual Family Café Location a...	<b>A</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>
I would rate the hotel's accessibility a...	<b>A-</b>	<b>B+</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A-</b>
I would give the organization of the Annual Family Café a...	<b>A</b>	<b>B+</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>
I would rate the choices for breakout sessions and their ability to meet the needs of different interests a...	<b>B+</b>	<b>B+</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A</b>
Overall, I would give The Annual Family Café a...	<b>B+</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>A</b>

Attendees also had the opportunity to respond to a series of subjective questions about the event:

1. As a result of attending The 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café, I am able/will be able to . . .
2. In general, the most helpful to me was . . .
3. I thought we could have had more of . . .
4. I thought we could have had less of . . .
5. I am interested in finding out more about . . .
6. I would like to suggest for future Annual Family Café events . . .

Here is a sample of their responses:

***As a result of attending The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café, I am able/will be able to . . .***

- Connect with and help others with disabilities
- Save money for the future
- Advocate for transition services
- Advocate better and be better prepared for transition out of high school
- Motivate my kids to achieve more goals in their health
- Get valuable resources, know more about everything
- Know and understand a little more about my rights regarding my child and her individual rights
- Learn more about who my legislative representatives are and go to them to inform them of any problems or situation that are not productive for our special population
- Transition out of early steps easier
- Better organize my son's IEP
- Inform parents of additional resources they may be unaware of
- Get help with dental
- Save without losing my social security and medical benefits
- Help my child with future expenses
- Help my son save money without losing social security
- Get trust and guardian advocacy started
- Prepare for ID college program
- Help my child be fit
- Receive resources about Autism
- Gained resource for better adaptive technology
- Be more prepared for emergency, how to handle problems with mental health
- To create new therapy ideas and toys for our son
- Be more comfortable around disabilities. I was able to make friends
- Get additional resources and assistance with managing my son's epilepsy, Asperger's, and behavioral/mental health issues.
- Learn about new developments and laws about disability
- Be more comfortable around people with disabilities
- Find appropriate housing for my child
- To have my son try and set up a new appointment with Vocational Rehabilitation

- Have fun and understand that it is okay to have a disability
- Help learn more about Vocational Rehabilitation/transition for High School to College
- Understand some of the process of APD services for my daughter
- Locate many services for my family member which I did not know existed in Florida
- To receive information about service dogs and Tourette syndrome
- Get my daughter the adaptive equipment she needs
- Finally get my daughter on Medicare
- Use Disability Rights Florida. I will call
- Save money for health related needs and go scuba diving and horseback riding
- Get resources closer to home for my sister that I did not know were available for her
- Craft a resume
- To save money for my child's future needs without him losing his SSI. And the need of guardianship
- Help my son engage in more community activities, particularly sports
- Apply for a McKay Scholarship and to find additional resources to help my child.
- Connect with other professionals, caregivers and advocates who serve people with unique abilities
- Be more prepared when searching for a lawyer and setting up future funding for my child
- Gain more confidence to conquer my goals of changing society's view of those with disabilities.
- Understand more about dyslexia. I thought dyslexia was a literacy problem, but now I understand it's a disability and additional interventions that would be beneficial for my child
- Travel better with my child with autism. The informational on travel and hospital visits were great!
- Explore resources that we didn't know existed.

***In general, the most helpful to me was . . .***

- All the information
- Knowing that others feel the same way that they need support and guidance
- All sessions on rights
- Workshops and hands on booths
- The advocacy track

- Women's Summit
- Early Steps information
- Learning better behavior management for anger and aggression/self-injury
- Volunteering so I could give back to The Family Café
- FAAST information
- Friday's keynote speaker, Kevin Hines
- Personal stories
- Information on education's choices, rights, laws ABLÉ United sessions
- Morgan Sensory Room
- Friendly staff
- The breakout session regarding the APD database change
- Workshops on employment and interview skills
- Networking with agency reps
- The college program and Partners in Policymaking
- Collecting information from tables
- Seeing other disabled families functioning like me
- The keynote addresses
- Meeting families who are going through the same thing my family is
- Everything about the school process
- Break outs about Special Needs Trust
- The huge amount of information that is available nowhere else
- Networking with other parents
- Meeting peers
- Job seeking for individuals with disabilities
- The emphasis on Mental Health
- The Employment Expo
- Information about policy updates
- Governor's Summit
- Activities for children, sensory room, SportsAbility, Early Steps playgroup
- Learning that people with Autism/high functioning can make it to College
- The Women's Summit
- The people looking out for one another
- Discussion relative to "Ticket to Work"
- Breakout sessions about work and CDC+
- The information from Vocational Rehabilitation
- Being able to bring my children along
- Learning to be an advocate
- Commissioner of Education talking to me



- The dentist
- Behavior class with autism
- Spina bifida roundtable
- Sensory room
- Disaster preparedness
- Mental health and autism roundtable
- Adaptive technology
- Communication with the non-verbal
- The breakout sessions with autism
- Making connections with DOE (and especially the ESE Director)
- All of it

***I thought we could have had more of . . .***

- Classes on home adaptability
- Professional expertise
- Elevators, quiet spaces for people with noise anxiety, reasonably priced food available
- Stuff about senior citizen legislative initiatives
- Kids activities
- Autism and fitting into middle school, what parents can do
- Youth programs
- Med waiver information
- Down syndrome classes and younger classes
- Luggage helpers and carts to assist with checking in to and out of the hotel.
- More age appropriate groups and for individuals with special needs to attend adult advocacy is different than advocacy for your child
- Sessions on ADHD
- Sessions geared toward individuals with developmental disabilities and aging in supported living. Not all clients have families to help them.
- Dual diagnosis information and resources
- Sessions that focus on high functioning kids with disabilities
- More time between sessions
- Promoting safety for person with disabilities with police and first responders
- Information from the exhibit hall in the sessions
- Transitioning from pediatric doctors to adult doctors
- Opportunities for social networking, events like the dance party
- Sibling classes
- Sessions on service animals
- Emphasis on transportation
- Duplicate of important topics on multiple days and times

- Legislators
- Mental health
- Parent coping skills
- Legal advice
- Emotional support for parents
- Audiology check
- Same classes at other times too man at one time could not fit it all in
- Spanish sessions
- Vendors with resources vs. products
- Activities for teenagers
- Invisible disorders were not addressed
- Workshops on the brain and nutrition
- Food options
- IEP discussions/tips
- Signage to point people where to go
- More information about employment services
- I really think it would be helpful if the conference had childcare.
- Nothing, everything was perfect

***I thought we could use less of . . .***

- Don't take anything away, keep adding on
- The exhibitor staff being more friendly
- Loud music
- Walking. Far from the parking garage
- So many sessions on the same topics
- Music groups in the hallways, instead of big room
- Selling vendors
- People taking over the sessions by telling their life stories
- Vendors that were not at their tables during break at the exhibit hall
- Sessions presenting what a company does instead of practical information
- Expensive food options for lunch
- Sessions that were taken over by questions and answers
- Long lines
- Door prizes take too long
- Bags and books: one per family would have been enough
- Smoking in common areas
- Long lines or wrong lines for registration
- Less carpeting! My arms were hurting so much from pushing.
- Advertising a breakout as X and the speaker talks about Y, Z, or anything else he wants.

- Same type of class topics offered at same time makes it difficult to attend both
- Registration being closed during keynotes. Some of us don't attend all of the keynotes for various reasons. There was no reason why I shouldn't have been able to register during a keynote when I wasn't going to attend it regardless.

***I am interested in finding out more about . . .***

- Volunteers and volunteering
- ABLE United
- What a person can do if they could not go to college
- Adult activities for disabled adults
- ADHD/Epilepsy
- Living facilities
- Cerebral palsy and assistance with adaptive technology for CP with equipment and supplies and toys
- School system and legal information
- How to navigate through the education system to get help
- Behavioral disorders succeeding in school and staying in school
- Adults with autism
- CDC+
- Teaching methods for dyslexia
- Medical homes
- More mom to mom programs to talk over situations
- IEP better to advocate
- Residential placement besides group homes
- Transition to adulthood
- Self-advocacy
- Obtaining guidance in what rights we have for our children
- FFAST
- Transition after high school to adult
- Nutrition
- Get A Plan for special needs
- Positive behavior supports
- Scholarships for kids in the public school system that would allow for additional resources
- ABLE United
- Service animals
- Autism and mental health

- Could there be something about g-tubes and feedings. Or parents giving information about their experiences
- Finding options for wheelchair vans
- Young adult trainings
- Respite services
- Advocacy
- Deaf and hard of hearing classes
- APD services for waiver recipients
- Employment incentives for persons with disabilities
- The McKay Scholarship
- Social security and food stamps
- Preparing for disaster with special needs
- Title II in the schools. The difference between ESE and Title II
- Next year's Annual Family Cafe
- Entrepreneurship
- Recreational activities for physically disabled adults that have no mental disabilities. Something like a dance or mild sports activities for adults
- Obtaining financial assistance to purchase expensive adaptive equipment for low income people
- Housing resources for mental health
- Blind services
- How to help with the Family Cafe and become a part of the team.

***I would like to suggest for future Annual Family Café events . . .***

- Handwriting workshops
- Separate the time of groups it was hard to choose.
- Please don't have it so cold in the rooms it's hard to pay attention when you are freezing.
- More booths, sessions, etc. for those that speak Spanish.
- More quiet places room for the therapy dogs
- More women/husband marriage sessions
- I had issues with the distance the parking garage was from the hotel. I also heard others commenting on this as well. The hotel did have golf carts available however, they would have separated families with members in wheel chairs.
- Include more technology based stuff
- To have more speakers with disabilities speak and do presentations!!
- Staggered checkout times to help with the elevators everyone trying to load up and checkout before Sunday keynote
- More down time
- Getting company like food banks of fresh food to donate food for the event
- More volunteers at registration on Friday

- More kid-friendly activities; childcare??
- Youth summit for keeping the kids involved
- To give more time for lunch and to provide a notebook to take notes
- Break down the alphabet into smaller ranges so registration is quicker and goes more smoothly
- More youth speakers
- More over all kids activities
- Class for sibling's who help take care of their brother or sister that have a disability
- More days, more duplication so as not to miss seminars due to conflicts
- Story time by any parent advocate child, young adult, example poetry, shorts stories, comedy skits.
- Dating tips dating people with special needs
- That the round table events be in a longer time slot
- The same topics in Spanish
- Personal testimony
- Possibility of putting in book where the family restroom well be located and letting all the helpers know where they will be located
- A how to budget on examples of monthly income versus benefit and SSI reductions
- More training for volunteers/ they didn't know where to take me to get badges
- Onsite childcare for individuals with special needs
- Let family and friends get large print and the braille for those that can see
- Inspirational and uplifting self-care sessions for professionals, families, etc. aimed to relieving stress and tension, frustration, pressure, etc.
- Moving the music and bands to a different location. It becomes too much out in the hallway. 1:1 consultations about returning to work: mock interviews, resume writing, starting a business (first 5 steps).
- A larger hands on activity area for the kids.
- Round table for significant others or care givers of adults with mental health issues how they cope in crisis help that is available during this time.
- Microphones for presenters, very difficult to hear them over all the noise in most every class I took
- Better signage for the breakout sessions.
- Have a few more social activities for the kids and special needs adults during the sessions run by volunteers and include the 'typical' siblings.
- Why try to change perfection



**I WANT  
YOU!**

**THEY  
NEED  
YOU!**

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*The Family Café*  
**CHANGE AGENT NETWORK**

**WWW.FAMILYCAFE.NET**

**SEE YOU NEXT YEAR**  
**At The 19th Annual**



**June 16-18, 2017**  
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