



**QUESTIONS AND
ANSWERS BOOK**

“Let’s Talk!”

*Want to know what’s happening during the 2025 State Legislative Session?
Then join us for our weekly “Let’s Talk!” Zoom Legislative Update!*



zoom

The Family Cafe believes that it’s critical for people with disabilities, their families, and advocates to stay informed about what’s happening in Tallahassee. That’s why we host a weekly Zoom meeting to share updates and answer questions every Friday at 4:00 ET throughout the sixty-day legislative session!

Join us!

Welcome to The Family Café Questions & Answers Book for 2024!

Navigating the service delivery system and finding resources has always been a challenge for people with disabilities and their families. That's why The Family Café exists! Since 1998, our mission has been to connect Florida's disability community 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 gathering was our largest to date, as we came together to share another helping of Collaboration, Advocacy, Friendship, and Empowerment at The 26th Annual Family Café.

We're excited to report that this year's event hosted more than 15,000 attendees. They were treated to the widest selection of activities we've ever hosted, with an assistive technology showcase, a Book Fair, a sensory room, an adaptive recreation sampler, and the "Club Café" room for transition-age youth. That's all in addition to our usual array of breakout sessions on a whole range of topics, and our Exhibit Hall with dozens of booths, including key state agency partners and self-advocate owned and operated Micro-Enterprises.

Of course, the core of the event was once again our series of keynotes, with Executive Director of the National Disability Rights Network and parent to a child with a disability Marlene Sallo discussing the true meaning of "accessibility" and "accommodations" when it comes to the education and support of children and youth with disabilities; physician, advocate, and person in recovery from opioid and benzodiazepine addiction, Dr. Stephen Loyd, leading a conversation about opioids and addiction; and advocate Cam Calkoen sharing both laughs and insight into his disability experience, and reminding us to "live for awesome." We also renewed our tradition of connecting attendees with key policymakers at The Annual Governor's Summit on Disabilities, where disability-serving state leaders shared their vision for Floridians with disabilities. All of those events were available to view live through our Facebook page, and have been added to our virtual training library at familycafe.net/videos/ and on our YouTube page.

Of course, no matter how informative The Annual Family Café is, it can't answer every question! That's why we collect questions and comments from families like yours and put together the responses we get from state agencies to create ***The Family Café Questions & Answers Book***. This book can serve as a quick reference guide and a starting point for anyone seeking information about disability services in Florida. 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 next year at The 27th Annual Family Café on June 13-15, 2025, at the Hyatt Regency Orlando. Online registration opens on Friday, February 14th. Until then, feed your need for information with *The Family Café Questions & Answers Book*!

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The Family Café

Less a question, more of a concern! Every year I have attended, I have been harassed! I report this every year and nothing is ever done or changed.

The Family Café will not tolerate any kind of harassment of even attendees. If you experience any kind of harassment or other issue at The Annual Family Café, please find one of the staff members or board members in a red chef coat so the problem can be addressed.

Is there a rep in our area or website for more resources?

Unfortunately, The Family Café does not have the resources or infrastructure to have representatives in different areas of the state. You can find updates and resources at The Family Café website at familycafe.net. You can also contact the Family Care Council in your area at fccflorida.org.

This is just a thank you! I have gotten so much information this weekend.

You're welcome! We do our best to put together an informative event. It's great to hear that you got a lot out of it.

Can we please get the parking situation under control for the locals not able to stay at the hotel? We tried to park over the road and it took 15 minutes to get here. It's dangerous for those who use ECVs, scooters, and other such.

Thanks for asking about parking at the Hyatt Regency Orlando. The Family Café works with the hotel to provide free self-parking for our attendees, however the amount of parking space is limited. This can become an issue when there are other ongoing events in the Hyatt or the connected Orange County Convention Center, especially when large numbers of Hyatt hotel guests have personal vehicles.

We are currently working on solutions to improve the parking situation in 2025 at The 27th Annual Family Café, and will do our best to have sufficient parking available for everyone that wants to attend.

Has there ever been discussion to have more advertising or media exposure for growth, knowledge and acceptance of the event and the community?

The Family Café commits its resources to hosting the event with no registration fee for families and a robust Financial Assistance program to cover the cost of hotel stays for selected recipients. Those efforts leave little funding for paid advertising or promotion. The Annual Family Café has grown thanks to word of mouth, and people in the Florida disability community letting others know about it. The Family Café has been fortunate to receive some media attention over the years thanks to news outlets visiting the event.

We very much support the acceptance of the disability community, and would love for more people to know about what we do, and what they can do to support and include people with disabilities. If you know anyone that could help spread the word, please invite them to The Annual Family Café!

Do you have to be connected to someone with a disability to come to the conference? I have friends who would like to learn how to help others.

No! While most attendees at The Annual Family Café are people with disabilities or their family members, there is no requirement to fit into those categories to attend. The Family Café is open to all! Anyone that wants to connect with the disability community is welcome.

Love the classes, so informative.

We do our best to put together an informative event. It's great to hear that you got a lot out of it.

I don't have a question – I want to thank you. I've received a scholarship to attend and when I tell you it's what we needed – oh man. My husband lost his job two days prior to the conference and y'all gave us some respite for Father's Day. We live with his parents and it was really nice to get away and refocus on June, our son and connect with other people and just remind ourselves that we can get through this and to stick together. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

It's wonderful to hear that The Annual Family Café helped you feel more energized and empowered. We have always been committed to connecting and informing families with the least financial impact possible, and our Financial Assistance program is key to that. We're glad you found it at a moment in your life when it was especially meaningful.

Are you having Family Café at the Hyatt next year? This was amazing! Thank you so much. Thank you for the help and learning.

Yes! The 27th Annual Family Café will be held on June 13-15, 2025 at the Hyatt Regency Orlando. We hope you can join us, and that you enjoy it as much as you did in 2024.

Can we access information and resources through a website? Can I have more information about The Family Café organization itself?

The Family Café is online at familycafe.net, where you can find additional resources. The organization itself began in 1998 when a group of families of people with disabilities recognized their shared challenge in finding the information, resources, and knowledge they required to facilitate their children's educational development. In response to this need, they came together to found The Family Café, an organization with the mission to provide individuals 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. To fulfill that mission, The Family Café created its signature event, The Annual Family Café. It would provide a unique environment, where families could connect with peers, commercial service providers, and public entities to find out what services are available to them, which best serve their needs, and how to go about securing those services, all in a family-friendly, welcoming environment that emphasizes community and inclusion. Since its inception, The Annual Family Café has grown from about 1,200 attendees to more than 15,000 at its peak. The Family Café has always believed that well-informed people make the best possible decisions for themselves and their loved ones. The Annual Family Café each summer provides the opportunity to put that principle into action. The event brings together thousands of Floridians with disabilities and their family members for three-plus days of information, training, and networking opportunities. Beyond The Annual Family Café, the organization has hosted a youth leadership program, the Florida Youth Council, since 2007; operates a Family-Run Organization Movement program to help local family leadership efforts prosper; and provides information and referral services year-round.

Café was good, but could use more included food. And fun for more. Teen fun and prizes not just toddler and kids.

Thanks for that feedback. As The Family Café is committed to bringing attendees to the event without a registration fee, the organization lacks the resources to provide meals for attendees during the event. However, attendees can take advantage of a 20% discount at all food outlets at the Hyatt.

Thanks also for your feedback about providing activities for youth and young adults. The Family Café has worked to address this need by hosting the Club Café room for young people at the event for the last two years. It's specifically designed to give young people with disabilities a place to learn and connect. We hope you get a chance to check it out in 2025.

Is there a way to identify or alert participants from the same area so that we can network on that level? It would be nice to see others from my area and share more experiences and information pertinent to us in that area. Also gives the kids a chance to reconnect with old friends they might miss seeing because the Café is so large.

Thanks for that feedback. One of the great things about The Annual Family Café is the way it brings together people from all regions of the state. The Family Café does not have a formal way for people to connect by county, but we do print the county each attendee comes from on their name badge to help people find each other. We also encourage people to create whatever type of gatherings they would like to when they come together at The Annual Family Café, and provide a platform for virtual organizing in the event app.

How did this all start???

The organization itself began in 1998 when a group of families of people with disabilities recognized their shared challenge in finding the information, resources, and knowledge they required to facilitate their children's educational development. In response to this need, they came together to found The Family Café, an organization with the mission to provide individuals 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. To fulfill that mission, The Family Café created its signature event, The Annual Family Café. It would provide a unique environment, where families could connect with peers, commercial service providers, and public entities to find out what services are available to them, which best serve their needs, and how to go about securing those services, all in a family-friendly, welcoming environment that emphasizes community and inclusion. Since its inception, The Annual Family Café has grown from about 1,200 attendees to more than 15,000 at its peak.

The elevator doors need longer response times.

Thanks for letting us know. With an event as large as ours that includes a significant number of wheelchair users, there can often be issues with elevator capacity, especially at peak times. We will work with the Hyatt to address this situation to the degree that we can, but ultimately what can be done is limited by the number of elevators in the hotel. The best solution, unfortunately, is to allow extra time to navigate the hotel.

How can we start a sib shop in our own community? My daughter attended one when she was younger and it helped her a great deal.

The Family Café Planning Committee that selects sessions for inclusion in the agenda has made an effort to include more content for siblings in recent years, and we recognize the desire for more information in this area. If you're interested in creating a sib shop in your community, our suggestion would be to reach out to the presenters from the sib shop and sibling sessions at this year's event. You can find their information listed in the program, which is online at https://familycafe.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024FamCAFE_Program_web.pdf.

Could you do more about companions and dog services?

Thanks very much for that suggestion, which we will share with The Family Café Planning Committee that selects presentations for inclusion in the agenda each year. We routinely receive requests for sessions and information on service animals, and made an effort to include that topic in this year's event. We will certainly do so again in 2025.

Have the exhibitors' booth numbers listed in the books. Set the elevator doors to stay open longer while exiting and entering.

Thanks for that suggestion about listing exhibitor booth numbers in the program. The reason we have not done that previously is because the print deadline for the program occurs before the final layout of the Exhibit Hall is completed. The good news is that you can find the booth number for every exhibitor in our smartphone app, which always includes the latest, most up-to-date information.

Thanks also for your note regarding the elevator doors. We recognize that navigating hotel elevators can be a challenge for wheelchair users and other people with disabilities. We will share your feedback with the Hyatt and see what solution they propose.

Do presenters pay to present or volunteer? I know a fire safety group that I think would be a great presenter if they were interested.

There is no direct cost associated with presenting at The Annual Family Café. The Presentation Proposal is open to all and can be found at familycafe.net.

In the event a presentation is accepted, the presenters must register to attend the event itself. There is no registration fee for people with disabilities, their family members, or caregivers. Professionals without a disability pay a \$250 registration fee.

What it would cost for the group you have in mind would depend on whether or not they are persons with disabilities or family members. That said, we would welcome a presentation on fire safety for people with disabilities, which is an important independent living issue.

It seems we are acknowledged as the disabled community as a whole. But it also seems that our actual needs are never addressed or acknowledged for that matter. It's about time for this to happen. What can we do to change this besides what's already being done (talking to our representatives, advocating, bringing awareness)?

Thanks very much for bringing up disability advocacy, which is a critical issue. In fact, it means so much to The Family Café, that the "A" in the CAFÉ acronym stands for "Advocacy!" (Collaboration, Advocacy, Friendship, Empowerment = CAFÉ.)

One way to make your advocacy voice heard is to connect with your elected officials and policymakers. The Family Café operates a program called "FROM," which stands for

Family-Run Organization Movement. FROM exists to help small local organizations find their advocacy voice and build networks in their local communities. You can learn more about FROM at familycafe.net/from/.

The Family Café also hosts a series of weekly discussions about disability policy during Florida's legislative session each year. That "Let's Talk!" Legislative Update Series provides a space to get updates on what's being discussed in Tallahassee, and how your advocacy can impact the course of disability policy. To get updates on the "Let's Talk!" series, join our mailing list or follow us on social media. Remember, your voice matters!

With release of ChatGPT, there are many people using large language models to design their own GPTs. Has Family Café thought about getting into Artificial Intelligence and designing its own GPT plugin? If all the wonderful information provided at the conference was available year-round in a GPT and continual machine learning, it could provide a new pathway for self-efficacy, and advocacy in the state of Florida.

That's an interesting idea! We've done a lot of work to leverage technology to improve our event and further our mission over the years, including our brand-new event portal at annual.familycafe.net that we introduced this year. We'll put your GPT idea on our wish list!

How do you get a booth for the exhibit hall?

Reserving a booth space in our Exhibit Hall is easy! Just visit our online portal at annual.familycafe.net/e/thefamilycafe/page/exhibitors to find all the details and complete the form to reserve your space.

The cost to reserve your booth for the full event is \$2,500. That includes a 10' x 10' area furnished with one skirted table, two chairs, and pipe and drape, as well as two complimentary professional registrations. We're also excited to offer two new benefits in 2025: lead generation and a virtual exhibit space in our event app.

To learn more about the process, check out the handy guide we created at familycafe.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/How-To-Order-Your-Exhibit-Space.pdf.

How many people came to this?

The 26th Annual Family Café was our largest to date, with 15,649 attendees. Thanks for being one of them!

Need to let people know that you have to be present to win.

The Family Café likes to award door prizes at all of our keynotes, including a larger set of giveaways at the event closing on Sunday. Since we don't have a means to collect winners' information other than the door prize ticket stub, it has always been policy that winners must be present to receive a door prize.

Need more ADHD platforms.

Thanks very much for that feedback. We'll share your request for content related to ADHD with our Planning Committee.

Family Café 2024 was fantastic and enjoyed many new informative classes! Thank you.

Thanks very much! It's great to hear you got so much out of The Annual Family Café. We hope you join us again next year!

I loved the keynote speakers.

Thanks very much! We work hard to find keynote speakers representing the range of disability experiences that will entertain and engage the audience at The Annual Family Café. If you know of any potential keynote speakers for next year's event, please let us know!

We traveled in from South Carolina, this is our second year attending. This is absolutely phenomenal. We used to live in Florida. Last year we saw the Autism Florida license plates. Could someone guide me on how I could go about getting something like this in place in South Carolina?

Wow! Thanks for coming such a long way to join us at The Annual Family Café! It's great to hear that you enjoyed it so much.

In Florida, the process of creating the Autism license plate involved legislative action. The process and rules about specialty license plates surely vary from state to state, but a good first step would be to contact the legislators that represent you in your state, and check in with your motor vehicle agency to find out about the available options and process.

You can learn more about Florida's Autism plate at www.autismlicenseplate.com.

Can we get more service dog info?

Thanks very much for that suggestion, which we will share with The Family Café Planning Committee that selects presentations for inclusion in the agenda each year. We routinely

receive requests for sessions and information on service animals, and made an effort to include that topic in this year's event. We will certainly do so again in 2025.

Had a great time. Need more space between booths.

We're happy to hear you enjoyed The Annual Family Café! Thanks for your feedback about the Exhibit Hall. We do allow extra space in the Exhibit Hall aisles to accommodate wheelchairs. We also want to include as many booths as possible to give attendees access to resources and information. We will continue working to strike the right balance between having a full, robust Exhibit Hall and allowing sufficient room for people to get around.

I've come for 20 years. I would like to see more vendors in the exhibit hall. Next year I would like to see it full of vendors and also I wish they had a class on disabilities of my age. I am now going to be 33 years old next year when I come back for Family Café. I hope to get financial aid next year Ms. Lori, and the youth council because every time I have been coming with my parents, we keep getting told we didn't get it so please Lori and the youth council, I would like it if you guys would start thinking about me and my parents. I would greatly appreciate it a whole lot, Ms. Lori and the youth council.

Thanks for that feedback. Our Planning Committee will look into ways to provide information and resources specifically for adults with disabilities.

Financial Assistance funding for a hotel room at The Annual Family Café is awarded by lottery. Everyone that requests assistance when they register has the same chance of getting it. In 2024, about 28% of the people that requested Financial Aid received it.

How can I advise and get the word out more in Alachua County? I would love to help advertise. How to get a scholarship? Some families get it every year and others don't and can't afford the price.

Thanks for being willing to spread the word about The Annual Family Café in your local area. Our organization doesn't have a significant budget for marketing, so we rely on our attendees to tell their friends and neighbors about the event. One great way to make sure people know about The Annual Family Café is by contacting ESE programs in your local schools.

As for Financial Assistance, it's awarded by lottery. Everyone that requests assistance when they register has the same chance of getting it. In 2024, about 28% of the people that requested Financial Aid received it.

How to be a part of The Family Café as a keynote speaker or vendor?

There are many ways you can be a part of The Family Café! You can learn more about many of the options on our new online event portal. To learn about how to purchase booth space in our Exhibit Hall, go to annual.familycafe.net/e/thefamilycafe/page/exhibitors. You can also find information on how to submit a Presentation Proposal at annual.familycafe.net/e/thefamilycafe/page/presenters. If you're interested in being a keynote speaker, you can contact us directly at info@familycafe.net.

It was a wonderful event. It was packed with so much I didn't get to see it all. I do wish there was a little more for the blind or partially blind person to get help as an adult not a child. Also maybe stuff for MS to learn more about and maybe a table that had more information on that. If you don't know MS happens to people when they are an adult so there is no help and people don't understand that they need assistance and it is a disability! Just because you can't see the disability doesn't mean they don't have a disability!

Thanks for that feedback. As a cross-disability event, we do our best to include content for everyone. We will share your request for more information for adults with visual impairments and Multiple Sclerosis with our Planning Committee. We agree that invisible disabilities should be included in addressing the needs of the broader disability community, and will keep working to make sure people in that group are considered in our event planning.

Can you add my email to your email list?

Absolutely! Anyone can join our mailing list by visiting familycafe.net/mailling-list/.

I was concerned that my lecture on cerebral palsy/orthopedic treatments was poorly attended and a very important topic. I wonder if there's further method of marketing topics prior.

Thanks for that feedback. The Annual Family Café has always operated on the principle of self-direction, and it's up to attendees to select which breakout sessions are most relevant for them. The Family Café works to provide a wide array of interesting options to choose from. As a presenter, you are free to promote your session, both through the description that appears in the event program and through any other means you have available.

The presenters and exhibits were phenomenal. Check in went so smoothly for guest receiving their bags. My daughter and I enjoyed the Family Cafe experience. Thank you

Thanks very much! We work hard to make the experience of attending The Annual Family Café both pleasant and informative. It's great to hear we met the mark for you!

Would like more sessions incorporating breaks, especially for those not in the host hotel. Made it difficult to take care of kids needs and be present.

Thanks for that feedback. We recognize that there are challenges attending as a family, especially when you're unable to find accommodation in the Hyatt. One strategy that families have used to help with that is to have one family member attend sessions while another provides childcare. The Annual Family Café is a family-friendly event, and we do what we can to make it both informative and manageable for families. We will continue to work to improve the experience for families that attend.

This was my first year attending Family Cafe. I loved it! I was part of the book fair. It was a great experience that I hope to repeat next year.

Thanks very much! We're happy to be able to showcase the work of authors with disabilities and others writing about the disability experience in our Book Fair. We'll look forward to seeing you there again in 2025.

Me and my family throughly enjoyed the Family Cafe 2024! I can't wait to return next year. So many great activities and speakers.

Thanks very much! We hope you can join us again for The 27th Annual Family Café, June 13-15, 2025.

Great amazing conference – loved it over 10 years coming. Love the mental health classes and also speakers in big room. So helpful. There was so much offered for my 16 year old. Would love to see a vendor offering haircuts and a sensory room for ideas for older kids. Can't wait for next year. Thank you!

Thanks very much for the positive feedback, and for being a long-time attendee! We've never had a vendor offering haircuts, but we'll share the idea with our Planning Committee.

Can you provide families with a 1 day event to Disney World or the Aquarian of Orlando with free or little cost so they can experience an outing outside of every day living?

It would be great if The Family Café had the resources to send families on an outing, but unfortunately we do not have the necessary funding, and the type of theme park outing you suggest would fall outside of our mission.

We enjoyed Family Cafe, and thank you for the hotel stipend. This was a marvelous conference, and we thank you.

Thanks very much! We do our best to provide training, information, and networking opportunities at the least possible cost to attendees with disabilities and their families, and it's great to hear that our Financial Assistance program made a difference for you.

Please include meals again to the to the Family Cafe event. Get sponsors to provide money or food in exchange for publicity. Save the money spent in bags, shirts, and tags. The vendors provide the bags we need to use, tags can be sent via email, shirts not a necessity. Food should be the number #1 priority because it's very expensive in the hotel and in the area. Get local businesses to sponsor the food or give money towards meals.

Thanks for that suggestion. The cost of food at the hotel is an issue that often comes up. Unfortunately, hotels do not generally allow outside food to be brought in, and require organizations hosting events on site to purchase food through the hotel's banquet services. Several of the items you mentioned such as conference bags and t-shirts are purchased directly by sponsors, and those sponsors make the determination as to how their funding is spent. We have had some sponsors provide limited food events in past years, but generally speaking, this is rare as hotel banquet services are expensive and sponsors don't see them as a marketing approach that delivers a good return on investment.

Need more hotel availability closer to where Family Cafe is being held. Overflow at Rosen at Point Place is too far to walk and even with shuttle cant have a place to just walk to for resting, eating, and even get to all sessions in a timely manner with special needs family member.

Thanks for that feedback. As the event has grown over the years, it's become more difficult to find accommodation for everyone at the host hotel. With more than 15,000 attendees in 2024, The Family Café contracted with three additional hotels beyond the main host hotel. In doing so, we used the hotels closest to the event site and secured a rate similar to that being charged at the Hyatt. We are aware that it can be a challenge for some attendees to travel from an overflow hotel to the main site, and our Planning Committee is working on potential solutions to make it easier.

Can you talk about The 27th Annual Family Cafe event for people with disabilities?

The 27th Annual Family Café will be held on June 13-15, 2027 at the Hyatt Regency Orlando, and will include three days of information, training, and networking. With a great range of individual breakout sessions, a packed Exhibit Hall with hundreds of vendors, and a series of special events including Keynote speakers and The Governors' Summit on Disabilities, The 27th Annual Family Café will offer attendees exposure to resources on a grand scale, unprecedented access to policy-making officials, and a chance to network with other individuals with disabilities and their families.

As always, there will be no registration fee for individuals with disabilities and their families, and limited Financial Assistance will once again be available to cover the cost of your hotel stay at the host site, the Hyatt Regency Orlando. To apply for Financial Assistance, simply check the box on the registration form. Online registration opens on February 14th, and Financial Assistance will be determined by lottery.

We'll see you there!

It was the best experience ever.

Wow, that's a high rating! Thanks very much!

I did attend the Family Cafe 2024 but was extremely disappointed that it was held on Father's Day weekend. Next year's Family Cafe is also planned for Father's Day weekend. I had to leave on Saturday night to meet up with my sons and my husband to celebrate Father's Day. I hated missing out on the closing of Family Cafe. When did we stop respecting men and now Fathers? I think one of the solutions to so many absenteeism among fathers may be showing them more respect and letting them know that they matter and are important in the lives of their children. I had a letter for Governor Ron DeSantis but he was a no show and it was a great let down.

Thanks for that feedback. Please be assured that the scheduling of The 26th Family Café had nothing to do with our organization's stance on the importance of fatherhood. In fact, the event included a track of breakout sessions on fatherhood to emphasize its importance. The reality is that contracts with hotels for large-scale events like The Annual Family Café are made years in advance, and it is a challenge to book specific weekends. Despite planning years in advance, it is usually the hotel that decides what dates are available, not The Family Café. The event dates for 2024 and 2025 are the ones that the Hyatt had available in the month of June.

As for Governor DeSantis' participation, his schedule is determined solely by his staff. Unfortunately, he was not able to attend on Friday evening at The 26th Annual Family Café as we had hoped. We would encourage you to send your letter to the Governor's Office directly.

We had a glitch with the registration, but it was handled very professionally and quickly. I ususally have to stay at the table, but I want to attend the workshops to better help the people I serve. I there a way to get a link to all of the workshops as they are going on so I can watch while I am at the table? Or record a demo of each workshop for download after the event, like when we get back to the hotel? I would also recommend that the crowd be made aware if the governor is or is not going to attend prior to the time of the meeting so the evening's plans can be made with correct information. It runs late and usually I

have a couple IDD students with me who are used to their meal schedule. If we were going to stay for the governor's speech but he does not show up, I'd rather feed the students as to advert the negative behaviors and/or affects of not sticking to the schedule. The scheduled meals are also for medical reasons. Other than that, it is a fantastic event that is so packed full of resources and we love to attend.

Thanks for your feedback and your suggestions. It would be wonderful if we were able to livestream every breakout session at the event, however the cost related to that level of AV and IT project is prohibitive. We do livestream all of the keynote events and breakout sessions held in the main ballroom.

As for Governor DeSantis' participation, his schedule is determined solely by his staff. Unfortunately, he was not able to attend on Friday evening at The 26th Annual Family Café as we had hoped. We informed everyone through a message in our smartphone app as soon as we became aware that he could not attend.

It was very concerning the amount of latex balloons present at this year's conference. As someone with a latex allergy, I was very uncomfortable and unable to spend as much time in the exhibit hall as I wanted due to the amount of balloons circulating. A few exhibitors had balloon arches. I understand they're cheaper than foil, but they are inappropriate for a disability conference. Latex allergies affect 1% of the population and latex balloons are banned from most Florida hospitals. Please take an example from those hospitals.

Thanks very much for that feedback. The Family Café has actually banned latex balloons from the Exhibit Hall in previous years for the very reasons you mention. Unfortunately there were a handful of Exhibit Hall vendors that were either unaware of or chose to ignore our requests to not have latex balloons in the Exhibit Hall. We will make this a point of emphasis in communicating with exhibitors in 2025.

Please work on a better registration set up, especially for individuals who may not be able to wait in a crowded, loud and clustered line. I noted a few sensory overloaded individuals, some in wheelchairs who were visibly upset. Also closing the registration line in the middle of the morning causes back up and confusion, especially for those who can't sit long enough to listen to the opening keynote.

Thanks for your feedback. Given the size of The Annual Family Café, the registration process on site can be challenging even when it's running smoothly. Our Planning Committee revisits the process every year, and we are already thinking through ways to make it better.

Is there a way to offer the hotel scholarship for the night before so people who have to travel to the event can get the full day? My travel was delayed due to train delays, so I missed the entire first day of events

Thanks for that suggestion. Financial Assistance recipients that request the full weekend and live more than 250 miles from the event site receive three nights of accommodation. We understand that not being able to arrive on Thursday evening instead of Friday morning can complicate logistics for some attendees. At the same time, it's our intent to offer Financial Assistance to as many attendees as possible. Offering three nights of accommodation to all Financial Assistance recipients would mean the total number of families receiving assistance would decrease, so we have to balance our desire to make things easy for recipients with our commitment to bring as many as we can to the event.

No question, but this was a fantastic Cafe!! Thank you for the opportunity to come all the way from NW Florida and partake in this Family Cafe!

Thank you! We'll hope to see you again next year!

Can there be more vendors for Down syndrome?

The Annual Family Café is a cross-disability event, and we do our best to have something at for everyone, regardless of their disability experience. That said, we will certainly share your request with our Planning Committee and consider how we can enhance the event for attendees with Down syndrome. If there are particular vendors you would like to see at the event, please let them know about The Annual Family Café, or contact our office to let us know who they are so we can reach out.

I just want to say . . . you're all fantastic and thank you for having our family!

Our pleasure! We will hope to see you again next year.

Is there a way to view sessions we were unable to attend?

There are a few ways to access content from sessions you may have missed. All three keynotes, the Governor's Summit, and breakout sessions held in the main ballroom are all livestreamed on our Facebook page, and the recordings from all those events remain available there. We also have a full library of breakout sessions from previous events on our YouTube page. Finally, you can always contact the presenters of sessions you may have missed directly. The contact information for each presenter is printed in the event program, and we encourage you to put it to good use. The program can be found online at familycafe.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024FamCAFE_Program_web.pdf.

Where will the conference be next year?

The 27th Annual Family Café will be held on June 13-15, 2025 at the Hyatt Regency Orlando, the same location as in 2024.

Can we make a hotel reservation before Family Cafe registration day!? We called February 14 immediately after registering for Family Cafe and all the rooms were taken at the Hyatt. I am 80 and it was difficult this year going back and forth from the Rosen. I DID like the Rosen better than the Hyatt. Thank you. We look forward every year to Family Café.

Thanks for that question. One of the downsides of The Annual Family Café being so popular is that it can be difficult to reserve a hotel room. There is a block of rooms available at the Hyatt Regency at a special event rate. Generally speaking, that block opens for sale in January.

Is there a way to have any of the missed sessions email information or PowerPoint notes?

The best way to get information from sessions you have missed is to contact the presenters directly. The contact information for each presenter is printed in the event program, and we encourage you to put it to good use. The program can be found online at familycafe.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024FamCAFE_Program_web.pdf.

Is it possible to include parent/guardian panel discussions, e.g. keeping afloat, navigating the waitlists, perseverance tips; panel discussions from seasoned care givers

Thanks very much for those suggestions. We have included a number of roundtable discussion sessions in previous years, although most of them have been disability-specific, with roundtables dedicated to particular disabilities. We will share your ideas about topical roundtable sessions with our Planning Committee.



The Agency for Health Care Administration

SSI – there is a limit to how much you can earn per year, however the presenter did not know the amount at the presentation. I would like to know the limit please.

Please contact the Social Security Administration (SSA) regarding questions on SSI funding.

Wheelchair assistance/programs for billing Medicaid/Medicare?

For recipients enrolled in Florida Medicaid, please contact the recipient's Managed Care Plan or contact the Florida Medicaid Helpline at 1-877-254-1055 (TDD 1-866-467-4970) regarding coverage and billing of durable medical equipment.

How can we as a group address the \$2,000 Medicaid income limit?

Please refer to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for inquiries related to Medicaid eligibility.

I want to know how can I get benefits for my daughter. She doesn't have Medicaid and I would like some help.

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 apply online at www.myflfamilies.com.

Can someone help me get the application for Med Waiver for my five year old granddaughter? We can't figure out how to get the documents to fill out.

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) oversees the iBudget waiver. Please contact APD for application questions and assistance at <https://apd.myflorida.com/customers/application/> or toll-free 1-866-273-2273.

Why is it so hard to find vendors who accept Medicare and will cover our DME supplies (wheelchairs, ostomy supplies etc.)? And when you switch insurance

providers, they refuse to perform repairs on a chair that they did not provide, so you have to get a new chair again.

Medicare is a federal program that provides health care coverage to people who have worked for a certain number of years and have reached age 65 or have certain disabilities. For questions relating to eligibility or services covered by Medicare, please contact Medicare by calling 1-800-633-4227.

What is being done so people with disabilities who are on Medicaid can work and not lose their benefits. I know there's working people with disabilities but how can people become aware of it so others in my position can work?

Please contact the Social Security Administration (SSA) regarding questions on Social Security Disability Income and working while disabled.

I missed the session on Fair Hearing for Medicaid, and I wanted to learn more about my options to restore my child/family services and care. Where can I find out more about this important information?

Please contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) regarding Fair Hearings for Medicaid eligibility at (850) 488-1429, appeal.hearings@myflfamilies.com or online at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/about/office-inspector-general/appeal-hearings/how-request-public-assistance-hearing>.

I know some folks who were taken off the Medicaid list? Without notice. Makes my fearful that we can loose our services without notice. Aren't you supposed to let us know prior to loosing services? Can we "fight" not to be taken off? This presenter stated that hundreds of thousands of people have been taken off the Medicaid services list. Most never knew about it until it was too late!

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 apply online at www.myflfamilies.com.

It is so important to know about your rights of such critical services/needs when trying to protect your government benefit eligibility. This should be a "class" that is offered on a website or utube for families to view periodically to ensure that they stay up to date of decisions that are being made in their behalf.

For questions related to eligibility please contact the Department of Children and Families (DCF) at 1-866-762-2237.

My son was receiving Medicaid services all through his learning years at school. Now that he graduated from school, his services were dropped by AHCA as his testing proved that he did not have autism anymore and his medical services were no longer available to him. He lost Medicaid totally. The only change he had between that Tuesday and Wednesday were 24 hours of time. He still has autism. Why did the evaluator determine that he no longer qualifies for Medicaid? This is terrible!

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 apply online at www.myflfamilies.com.

I know that KidCare is administered by CMS, but since this is a health plan why? Determination should be done by the Medicaid office!

Florida Healthy Kids offers health coverage for children ages 5 through 18 and can be reached at 1-888-540-5437. The Florida Department of Health (DOH) administers the Children's Medical Services (CMS) health plan for children with special health care needs from birth through age 18. The DOH oversees the screening for clinical eligibility for the CMS program. For questions related to CMS health plan clinical eligibility, please contact the DOH on their Clinical Eligibility Hotline at 1-855-901-5390.

Managing health care plans is hard. Why can't we just be assigned a provider and all providers supply the same services/supplies/costs?

In 2011, the Florida Legislature created Part IV of Chapter 409, Florida Statutes, directing the Agency to create the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care (SMMC) program. Most Medicaid recipients are required to enroll with a Medicaid Managed Care Plan. Recipients can contact the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055 if they have questions or need assistance with services.

When my wheelchair breaks, why doesn't the Agency work with me to get a replacement? My wheelchair provider tells me that they don't work with AHCA anymore due to complications with payment/reimbursement. Why?

Florida Medicaid will reimburse for a wheelchair when it is medically documented that a wheelchair is necessary to meet a recipient's physical needs. Certain wheelchairs such as customized wheelchairs, power wheelchairs, and motorized scooters do require prior authorization.

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, including wheelchairs. Recipients can also contact the Medicaid Help Line at 1-877-254-1055 for assistance.

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities

Where can we find services for adult persons with disabilities while out of town? My daughter is total care but there is always a threat to cut her funds. What can we do so this doesn't happen to her money and not have to cut her services or care? Are there any guardian services that can be shared for those over 18 or 21?

Individuals served by the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) can always communicate with APD or their Waiver Support Coordinator (WSC) regarding any location changes that may impact services. It is important to note that domicile in Florida is a requirement for APD services. However, APD and WSCs can sometimes assist with coordinating service provision while an individual is temporarily out of town.

The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC)'s publication entitled *Lighting the Way to Guardianship and Other Decision-Making Alternatives: A Manual for Individuals and Families* may be a helpful resource for you. This publication can be downloaded from <https://www.fddc.org/publications/>. Disability Rights Florida provides information relating to guardianship and supported decision making https://disabilityrightsflorida.org/disability-topics/category/supported_decision_making that may be helpful to you.

An incredible and valuable resource for Floridians with disabilities and their caregivers is the new program within APD, Hope Florida – A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

Why isn't there more money placed for mental health for people with disabilities? Why is it being pushed to put people with disabilities into group homes/institutions when the families will gladly take care of them if they had help? Why isn't there more emphasis on people with disabilities and giving more funds instead of cutting the money, especially when there are so many on the waiting list?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) continues to invest in developing teaming models to serve individuals with developmental disabilities and co-occurring mental health diagnoses. This includes the development and expansion of our existing pilot program for Mobile Response Teams. The pilot includes a co-response from subject matter experts in

both behavioral health and developmental disabilities as a part of the existing mobile response team framework. The pilot also includes education and training for key positions to effectively support individuals with a dual diagnosis. The pilot is currently focused on assisting individuals in Orange, Broward, Leon, and Hillsborough counties.

For assistance in your local community, please contact one of the APD Regional offices nearest you. The contact information can be found at Regional Offices | APD - Agency for Persons with Disabilities - State of Florida <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

Why did Children’s Medical Services tell APD to close the sheltered workshops paying their clients below minimum wage when some can NOT work in the free market? Right now, the disabled kids can’t work or learn without some pay.

There are a variety of opportunities to help individuals with disabilities in achieving their employment goals. Individuals enrolled in the iBudget Florida Waiver accessing Prevocational Services are eligible for compensation below the minimum wage. However, due to changes in federal requirements, subminimum wage services are not available during day habilitation services, such as Adult Day Training.

APD is committed to increasing opportunities for those served by the Agency through competitive integrated employment.

Prevocational Services provide learning and work experiences, where individuals can develop general, non-job-task-specific strengths and skills that contribute to paid employment. Services are intended to develop and teach general skills that lead to competitive and integrated employment. This includes things like learning the ability to communicate effectively with supervisors, co-workers and customers; understanding generally accepted workplace conduct and dress; following directions; attending to tasks; employing workplace problem-solving skills and strategies; and could be general workplace safety and mobility training.

The Employment Enhancement Project funds are non-Medicaid dollars that help individuals who are not enrolled on the iBudget Florida Waiver access supported employment services to help find and maintain competitive employment and participate in meaningful internships that have a high likelihood of resulting in competitive employment.

Supported Employment Services provide training and assistance to help support individuals in job development and sustaining paid employment at or above minimum wage unless the individual is operating a small business. This service can be performed on a full- or part-time basis. The Supported Employment Coach assists with the acquisition, retention, or improvement of skills related to accessing and maintaining such employment or developing and operating a small business. With the assistance of the provider, the individual receives help in securing employment according to the individual’s knowledge, skills, abilities, supports needed, desired goals, and planned outcomes. This service is conducted in a variety of settings, including work sites in which individuals without disabilities are employed. This service should include assisting individuals to learn job

tasks needed to be employed, and the individual should be included in all aspects of job development, interviewing, and job seeking activities.

The Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program was established as a way to recognize businesses that employ individuals who have a disability as well as businesses that establish or contribute to organizations that support the independence of individuals who have a disability. Last legislative session, the Florida Legislature moved this program under APD. The movement of this program will allow the Agency to build upon the foundation of the program, provide direct connectivity to an eager and skilled workforce (one of which APD is already engaged with) to employers of multiple industries that in today's economy are in need of direct connection to a talent pipeline.

For assistance in connecting to employment opportunities, please contact an APD Regional office. The phone numbers are linked here: [Regional Offices | APD - Agency for Persons with Disabilities - State of Florida](#) www.apd.myflorida.com/region/.

Is there a way to save money for an adult without them losing help from other organizations like APD Med waiver? Saving money for a better vehicle or things like modifications on the house that they can't get help with.

Here are some potential resources:

An ABLE United account is a way for Floridians with disabilities to save, tax-free, and plan for the future. To qualify for an ABLE United Account, the individual must be a Florida resident at the time of application and have a qualifying disability with onset prior to age 26. Funds can be used to pay for disability-related expenses that help improve or maintain health, independence, or quality of life. Please visit <https://www.ableunited.com> or call 1-888-524-2253.

The 2019 "Working People with Disabilities" legislation directed the Agency for Health Care Administration to request an increase to the monthly income limit for individuals with earned income through paid employment. This allows individuals enrolled in certain home and community-based services waivers (including the iBudget Florida Waiver) to have increased income and asset limits without losing their SSI benefits. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) implemented the changes on July 1, 2020. For additional information about how the "Working People with Disabilities" legislation might affect individuals enrolled on the iBudget Florida Waiver, please click this link: Working People with Disabilities Handout, FINAL.pdf <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/providers/supported-employment/docs/Working%20People%20with%20Disabilities%20Handout,%20FINAL.pdf>

There are some Social Security Work Incentive programs that allow individuals to work and maintain benefits. For more information, please visit Social Security Online - Work Incentives - General Information. <https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/generalinfo.htm#work>

I am on CDC Plus – we love this program! Please don't stop or change. This program continues to make it better for my family. Put more funds into Medicaid Waiver to help families.

Thank you for your feedback. Consumer-Directed Care Plus (CDC+) places participants in the driver's seat. Individuals have more choice, flexibility, and control over their care. CDC+ consumers become employers with the ability to choose what services and supports they need and who will provide them. For more information, please visit apdcares.org or call 1-866-761-7043.

Why are there no resources for adults? Lifestyle options for them? Like camps and programs for adults, programs for parents, and therapies to deal with their behaviors?

The mission for Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD is to support individuals with disabilities and their families in living, learning, and working within their communities by creating multiple pathways to possibilities. APD provides a variety of social, medical, behavioral, residential, and therapeutic supports to assist individuals with developmental disabilities. Some services help individuals with transitioning into adulthood.

To apply for APD services, or if you have additional questions, please contact one of the APD Regional offices nearest you or access our new online application for services here: <https://applynow.apd.myflorida.com/>

The telephone numbers and addresses of APD Regional offices can be found here: <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

Additionally, APD is excited to partner with Floridians with disabilities of all ages and their caregivers through Hope Florida, A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

Why is guardian advocacy only for people with developmental delays? It should be for others too.

These are important questions to consider when planning for the future. There are many decision-making options for individuals with disabilities. This can include guardianship, as well as less restrictive options.

The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC)'s publication entitled Lighting the Way to Guardianship and Other Decision-Making Alternatives: A Manual for Individuals and Families may be a helpful resource for you. This publication can be downloaded from <https://www.fddc.org/publications/>. Disability Rights Florida provides information relating to guardianship and supported decision making

https://disabilityrightsflorida.org/disability-topics/category/supported_decision_making that may be helpful to you.

If you are already working with an attorney, we encourage you to discuss your concerns about the future with the attorney as part of the planning process. However, an attorney is not required for all decision-making options.

When can my son get behavior therapy? He has Down Syndrome, 39 years old. Why are there no resources for adults? Like style options for them? Like camps and programs?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves and supports individuals with disabilities and their families in living, learning, and working within their communities by creating multiple pathways to possibilities. For individuals with developmental disabilities eligible for iBudget Florida Waiver services, this includes an array of social, medical, behavioral, therapeutic, and residential services that are based on individualized needs and goals.

For assistance in accessing services within your community, please contact the APD Regional Office nearest you. These telephone numbers and addresses for these offices can be found here: <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>

Additionally, APD is excited to partner with Floridians with disabilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

How can we rate caregivers and agencies?

Individuals receiving services from APD have a choice in providers. As part of the provider selection process, APD encourages individuals to work with their Waiver Support Coordinators who can assist in choosing providers. Additionally, individuals can change providers at any time.

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) has a scorecard which provides information about Waiver Support Coordinators currently working in the State of Florida. Floridians with developmental disabilities and their families can use this information to make decisions about which Waiver Support Coordinator may be best for them. For more information, please visit www.apdcares.org.

Individuals who are receiving services from the Agency for Healthcare Administration, Medicaid State Plan can also report complaints. For more information, please visit this website: Florida Medicaid Recipients - How to File a Complaint | Florida Agency for Health Care Administration

<https://ahca.myflorida.com/medicaid/florida-medicaid-complaints/florida-medicaid-recipients-how-to-file-a-complaint>

When are elder issues considered disabilities?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) assists individuals with developmental disabilities ages 3 and up. Through APD's most traditional pathways, APD is able to serve individuals with developmental disabilities which include Intellectual Disabilities, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, Down syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, Phelan-McDermid syndrome, and also individuals between the ages of 3-5 who are at high risk for a developmental disability.

Some individuals may experience life changes as a result of aging that are not related to a developmental disability. Here are some resources in Florida to assist:

The Florida Department of Elder Affairs administers programs throughout the state that are geared towards the aging population through their Areas on Aging which serve as aging and disability resource centers. For more information, please contact 1-800-96 ELDER (1-800-963-5337).

Additionally, APD is excited to partner with Floridians with disabilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

What about a rating system similar to food delivery apps for APD providers to rate them on things like accountability, timeliness, and engagement?

Thank you for the feedback and innovative idea.

The Agency currently utilizes a Scorecard rating for Waiver Support Coordinators currently working in the State of Florida. Floridians with disabilities and their families can use this information to make decisions about which Waiver Support Coordinator may be best for them. The Scorecard will not allow you to choose or change a Waiver Support Coordinator. You will still need to contact your local APD office to do that.

Please get more funding for the transportation disadvantaged. It runs out next year. Get more individuals with unique abilities off the waitlist for the iBudget Waiver. Additionally, find a way for individuals with unique abilities to maintain their employment while not losing their benefits for working 40 hours a week.

For Fiscal Year 2024-2025, Governor DeSantis signed the Focus on Florida's Future Budget which includes \$2.6 billion for individuals and families served through the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD).

APD is committed to increasing opportunities for those served by the Agency through competitive integrated employment. To get connected, please contact the APD Regional office nearest you. The contact information can be found at: [Regional Offices | APD - Agency for Persons with Disabilities - State of Florida](#)
<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>

There are also different resources for individuals who are working and wish to maintain benefits:

An ABLE United account is a way for Floridians with disabilities to save, tax-free, and plan for the future. To qualify for an ABLE United Account, the individual must be a Florida resident at the time of application and have a qualifying disability with onset prior to age 26. Funds can be used to pay for disability-related expenses that help improve or maintain health, independence, or quality of life. Please visit <https://www.ableunited.com> or call 1-888-524-2253.

The 2019 "Working People with Disabilities" legislation directed the Agency for Health Care Administration to request an increase to the monthly income limit for individuals with earned income through paid employment. This allows individuals enrolled in certain home and community-based services waivers (including the iBudget Florida Waiver) to have increased income and asset limits without losing their SSI benefits. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) implemented the changes on July 1, 2020. For additional information about how the "Working People with Disabilities" legislation might affect individuals enrolled on the iBudget Florida Waiver, please click this link: [Working People with Disabilities Handout, FINAL.pdf](#) <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/providers/supported-employment/docs/Working%20People%20with%20Disabilities%20Handout,%20FINAL.pdf>

There are some Social Security Work Incentive programs that allow individuals to work and maintain benefits. For more information, please visit [Social Security Online - Work Incentives - General Information](#).
<https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/generalinfo.htm#work>

The Transportation Disadvantaged Program is a statewide program with resources in all 67 Florida counties for those who are eligible and have no access to transportation. To locate your Community Transportation Disadvantaged Coordinator, please visit: [Community Transportation Coordinators](#) <https://www.fdot.gov/ctd/ctcsbycounty>

Is APD's group housing or regular ICF housing safer for adult autistic men?

There are a variety of living options for individuals with disabilities. APD encourages individuals and their circles of support to choose housing and wrap around supports that meet their individualized needs.

APD can provide support coordination and care navigation services to assist individuals in planning for their short, medium, and long-term goals to best meet individualized needs. For more information, please call 866-APD-CARES (866) 273-2273.

Please help children on autism spectrum receive more APD services.

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves and supports individuals with Autism by providing a variety of community services and treatment options to eligible individuals based on their individualized needs and goals. For assistance, please contact the APD Regional office nearest you. These offices can be reached here:

<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>

Additionally, APD is excited to partner with Floridians with disabilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

Can APD provide more Information offering meaningful lifestyle options and housing for adults? Therapists for autistic adults?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves and supports individuals with Autism by providing a variety of community services and treatment options to eligible individuals based on their individualized needs and goals. For assistance, please contact the APD Regional office nearest you. These offices can be reached here:

<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>

Additionally, APD is excited to partner with Floridians with disabilities of all ages and their caregivers through Hope Florida, A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

What APD progress is being made towards more services for adults on the spectrum?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD serves individuals with severe forms of Autism, as outlined in Florida Statute and the Florida Administrative Code. APD can provide a comprehensive assessment if it is needed during the application process to definitively identify a developmental disability. For assistance, please contact the APD

Regional office nearest you. These offices can be reached here:
<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>

Additionally, APD is excited to serve Floridians with unique abilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

When will APD CDC+ representatives be offered further training opportunities on collecting documentation?

Information regarding the Consumer Directed Care Plus (CDC+) required documentation is integrated across current CDC+ trainings and online resources, including the Welcome Packet, the CDC+ Handbook, the Appendix to the How-to Guide. These resources have instructions and reference examples of forms representatives regularly use in their CDC+ account management.

Depending on the documentation needed to be collected, additional resources can be found by navigating through our online Important Links such as Household Employer Forms or Electronic Visit Verification.

Please visit our website, Consumer Directed Care Plus | APD - Agency for Persons with Disabilities - State of Florida, to review these online resources.
<https://apd.myflorida.com/cdcplus/>

CDC+ documentation requirements are wide-ranging. For example, a behavior assistant's progress notes or justification for attendance at a seasonal camp or supporting documentation—like price quotes—for consumable medical equipment.

However, if you have questions or difficulties (general or specific) about CDC+ documentation requirements or have a particular document in mind that you'd like to see stressed, you can contact the CDC+ trainer at larry.hill@apdcares.org for assistance.

I would like to know more about APD's program for auditory processing disorder please. Can I have suggestions for accommodations at school and home?

There are a variety of resources to assist in determining a solution that is individualized to the person's needs. Some potential resources are:

- Individuals needing accommodations to attend school, obtain employment, or maintain employment should contact the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to discuss service options. To find contact information for a location near you, please visit <https://www.rehabworks.org/>.

- Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST) helps Floridians with disabilities access assistive technology. For more information, please call Toll-free: 1-844-FL-FAAST or visit <https://faast.org/>
- Individuals attending college or university, should register with their disability services department for assistance with school accommodations.

You may need to work with your insurance, an audiologist, or your medical doctor to obtain an initial assessment to assist in determining accommodations or solutions that meet your needs. Collaboration between a variety of resources, such as those listed above may be necessary.

My son has been waiting on ABA for months. Here's the kicker . . . this company has no wait list and insurance said they would work with this company. Now, insurance is fighting it. Meanwhile, I'm dealing with behaviors that I don't know how to stop, such as physical aggression. I need help and I can't get it! He is receiving services both at school and on the waiver.

The Waiver Support Coordinator can assist you in accessing ABA therapies. Additionally, please feel free to contact the APD Regional office who can assist you in exploring options. The contact information can be found at: Regional Offices | APD - Agency for Persons with Disabilities - State of Florida <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>

Additionally, if your son is under the age of 21 and services are being provided through the Medicaid State Plan, more information can be found on the Agency for Healthcare Administration website here: Behavior Analysis Services Information | Florida Agency for Health Care Administration <https://ahca.myflorida.com/medicaid/medicaid-policy-quality-and-operations/medicaid-policy-and-quality/medicaid-policy/medical-and-behavioral-health-coverage-policy/behavioral-health-and-health-facilities/behavior-analysis-services-information>

Can there be better access to the diagnosis of Autism and by providing resources to all of the neurodiverse adults and young adults that for years have had to navigate this system alone without proper help, support or diagnosis(s) often stemming back from their childhood? Does APD offer this support/service?

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD serves individuals with severe forms of Autism, as outlined in Florida Statute and the Florida Administrative Code. APD can provide a comprehensive assessment if it is needed during the application process to definitively identify a developmental disability. For assistance, please contact the APD Regional office nearest you. These offices can be reached here: <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region>.

Additionally, APD is excited to serve Floridians with disabilities and their caregivers through Hope Florida, A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to

assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

I feel as if there is no support for kids 21 or older within APD, if your child is not verbal or unable to communicate.

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves and supports individuals with unique abilities and their families in living, learning, and working within their communities by creating multiple pathways to possibilities. For individuals with developmental disabilities eligible for iBudget Waiver services, this includes an array of social, medical, behavioral, therapeutic, and residential services that are based on individualized needs and goals. For assistance in accessing services, please contact the APD Regional Office nearest you. These telephone numbers and addresses for these offices can be found here: <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

An incredible and valuable resource for Floridians with disabilities and their caregivers is the new program within APD, Hope Florida – A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

Additionally, APD provides a variety of social, medical, behavioral, residential, and therapeutic supports to assist individuals with developmental disabilities. We would encourage you to contact your local APD office that can help guide you through the necessary documentation you may need to apply for services through the iBudget Florida waiver. The telephone numbers and addresses of APD Regional offices can be found here: <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>

I have two adult children with disabilities who live with me and I am a single mom. We are on the MedWaiver program so we are eligible for services but dealing with the iConnect/APD Cares programs is horrible. My caregivers spend more time signing in/out of programs and writing notes than they do giving quality Personal Support and Life Skills services to my two adult children. Every time I take one of my kids out, the caregiver has to sign out of 1-to-2 services, sign into 1-to-1 services, then when we come back they have to do the sign in/out again. Caregivers spend too much time writing detailed notes even though they do the same thing every day. There needs to be a better way to provide services for a FAMILY!

If you have specific questions regarding current services, please contact our of our local APD regional offices. The telephone numbers and addresses of APD Regional offices can be found here: <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region>.

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I don't know outside of Miami-Dade, but here, the work available for those of us with disabilities is deplorable. The 'disability week celebration' last year was inaccessible and insulting. And all efforts are seemingly only for disabled people who use a wheelchair and want to play sports. Only someone who does not understand the community would think that applies to us all. APD was a priemeir sponsor. Shame!

APD is committed to increasing opportunities for those served by the Agency through competitive integrated employment.

The Employment Enhancement Project funds are non-Medicaid dollars that help individuals who are not enrolled on the iBudget Waiver access supported employment services to help find and maintain competitive employment and participate in meaningful internships that have a high likelihood of resulting in competitive employment.

Supported Employment Services provide training and assistance to help support individuals in job development and sustaining paid employment at or above minimum wage unless the individual is operating a small business. This service can be performed on a full- or part-time basis. The Supported Employment Coach assists with the acquisition, retention, or improvement of skills related to accessing and maintaining such employment or developing and operating a small business. With the assistance of the provider, the individual receives help in securing employment according to the individual's knowledge, skills, abilities, supports needed, desired goals, and planned outcomes. This service is conducted in a variety of settings, including work sites in which individuals without disabilities are employed. This service should include assisting individuals to learn job tasks needed to be employed, and the individual should be included in all aspects of job development, interviewing, and job seeking activities.

The Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program was established as a way to recognize businesses that employ individuals who have a disability as well as businesses that establish or contribute to organizations that support the independence of individuals who have a disability. Last legislative session, the Florida Legislature moved this program under APD. The movement of this program will allow the Agency to build upon the foundation of the program, provide direct connectivity to an eager and skilled workforce

(one of which APD is already engaged with) to employers of multiple industries that in today's economy are in need of direct connection to a talent pipeline.

For assistance in connecting to employment opportunities within your community, please contact an APD Regional office. The phone numbers are linked here:

Regional Offices | APD - Agency for Persons with Disabilities - State of Florida
<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

My son has been approved for services since Jan 2023. Nothing has started because the process is very confusing. Can I use another agency other than my county to start the process for CDC +? I emailed APD to change service providers in August 2023 and no one has responded. How can I get services started? He's been out of school since January 2023.

The mission for Agency for Persons with Disabilities or APD is to support individuals with unique abilities and their families in living, learning, and working within their communities by creating multiple pathways to possibilities.

APD strives to ensure that the Consumer Directed Care Plus (CDC+) program is streamlined and meets the needs of participants and their families. For assistance, please contact the CDC+ Customer service line by calling 1-866-761-7041.

How can deserving adults with autism receive services quicker? There is far too much stalling and red tape by APD.

The Agency for Persons with Disabilities serves and supports individuals with Autism by providing a variety of community services and treatment options to eligible individuals based on their individualized needs and goals. For assistance, please contact one of the local Agency for Persons with Disabilities offices near you. The contact can be found here: Regional Offices | APD - Agency for Persons with Disabilities - State of Florida.
<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

An incredible and valuable resource for Floridians with disabilities and their caregivers is the new program within APD, Hope Florida – A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

Does APD have any good resources for parents of children with narcolepsy? Those who also receive services for DD? IDD? Seizure disorder?

An incredible and valuable resource for Floridians with disabilities and their caregivers is the new program within APD, Hope Florida – A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative

utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

Would like APD’s information about the new transition waiver that is coming for people who are transitioning out of school to adulthood. What does it entail, when will it be available?

APD is excited to share the investment for the study of a new Adult Pathways Waiver, which will be a Home and Community Based Services Medicaid waiver that aims to close gaps and preserve high school graduation for the exciting time that it should be for all Floridians who are transitioning to adulthood, by providing the necessary supports and services to meet varying levels of need.

The Agency’s report for the proposed program is due in December 2024 and will include recommendations that are derived from the integration of an actuarial analysis, stakeholder engagement, and APD research which informed the framework for the Adult Pathways Waiver.

Attendees are requesting more resources in Spanish. Attendees are requesting a directory be disseminated with regional APD contact information.

The APD website has brochures and materials available for print in Spanish. Please visit www.apdcares.org. For assistance or specific inquiries, please contact one of the local Agency for Persons with Disabilities offices near you. The contact can be found here: Regional Offices | APD - Agency for Persons with Disabilities - State of Florida <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

How come the State of Florida does not have a Board of Music Therapy approval for APD clients? Having a Board of Music Therapy will open doors in the private sector to pay for music therapy.

APD does not oversee the licensure for Music Therapist. However, if you are looking for resources in your local area, here are some options:

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<https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

What is the best way to connect with our legislators to share our stories and advocate for APD services?

Individuals are able to locate their respective members of the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate online. Both legislative chambers offer a "Find Your Legislator" webpage which provides the member's information and their office's contact information.

Constituents can locate this information at:
www.myfloridahouse.gov/FindYourRepresentative and www.flsenate.gov/Senators/Find.

How can a blind person get a caregiver without being on APD? They need services to help them get around.

An incredible and valuable resource for Floridians with disabilities and their caregivers is the new program within APD, Hope Florida – A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

The Division of Blind Services is another resource that may be able to help. For more information, please contact (800) 342-1828 or visit the following link: Contact the Florida Division of Blind Services. <https://dbs.fldoe.org/Information/contact.html>.

As children with special needs, and their parents/legal guardians continue to age, are there plans to develop planned communities to meet the needs of elderly parents and their aging children with special needs so that they don't have to be separated? Can waiver dollars help to support this?

There are a variety of living options for individuals with disabilities. APD encourages individuals and their circles of support to choose housing and wrap around supports that meet their individualized needs. It is important for individuals to plan for life transitions and consider all options when making decisions such as where to live, services, and providers.

APD can provide support coordination and care navigation services to assist individuals in planning for their short, medium, and long-term goals to best meet individualized needs. For more information, please call 866-APD-CARES (866) 273-2273.

How can we start a sib shop in our own APD District/community? My daughter attended one when she was younger and it helped her a great deal.

Below are some ways to connect with APD and individuals in your local community.

Please contact one of the local Agency for Persons with Disabilities offices near you. The contact can be found here: Regional Offices | APD - Agency for Persons with Disabilities - State of Florida <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

There are 15 Family Care Councils statewide that provide education and empowerment for self-advocates and their families. For more information, please visit: Family Care Councils of Florida - Family Care Councils of Florida <https://www.fccflorida.org/>.

An incredible and valuable resource for Floridians with disabilities and their caregivers is the new program within APD, Hope Florida – A Pathway to Possibilities. This initiative utilizes Hope Navigators to assist individuals identify their goals and overcome barriers to living, learning, and working within the community by making referrals to local community-based partners, including private sector and faith-based entities, and provide one-on-one support to develop a plan to achieve independence and maximize community integration. To connect with a Hope Navigator, please call 833-GET-HOPE (833) 438-4673.

At APD, it seems we are acknowledged as the disabled community as a whole. But it also seems that our actual needs are never addressed or acknowledged for that matter. It's about time for this to happen. What can we do to change this besides what's already being done (talking to our representatives, advocating, bringing awareness)?

APD is committed to assisting individuals by improving customer experience and offering multiple pathways to support individuals and their families. If you need assistance, please contact one of the APD Regional offices. The contacts can be found here: Regional Offices | APD - Agency for Persons with Disabilities - State of Florida <https://www.apd.myflorida.com/region/>.

The Department of Children and Families

My husband is in his 80s and has Alzheimer's. I can't get any help for him to go to a center or find diapers and pads, so I need to know who to talk to. I went to DCF and they never got back to me. I even went to Social Security and they said they couldn't help. He had a long-term care plan with Humana Horizon. They are the ones that cut his Medicaid off. So, I'm suffering right along with him. But I need help for him. They cut my Medicaid off too.

The Florida Department of Children and Families (Department) determines eligibility for Medicaid. To determine your eligibility for Medicaid, you will need to complete an application. If long-term care services in a nursing home or community setting are needed, the individual must check the box for HCBS/Waivers or Nursing Home on the Benefit Information screen. HCBS/Waiver programs provide in-home or assisted living services that help prevent institutionalization. If it is determined that you are not eligible for Medicaid, your application will automatically be referred to the Medically Needy Program, and other subsidized federal health programs.

The Department offers several ways to apply and manage government assistance:

1. The quickest way to apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Assistance) or Medicaid is online through the MyACCESS portal <https://myaccess.myflfamilies.com/>, where you can apply, make changes to your case, or check your status. This can be done through a computer or smartphone.
2. The Department provides In-person assistance at Family Resource Centers (FRC) and Community Partners. For a list of Family Resource Centers and Community Partners, please visit: <https://myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/FRC>.
3. Individuals can fill out a paper application for Food Assistance or Cash Assistance, Family-related Medical Assistance, Relative Caregiver, Optional State Supplementation, or medical assistance for those 65 and over, Blind or Disabled, Medicaid Waiver/Home and Community Based Services, Hospice, or Nursing Home Care. Paper applications, along with other Department forms, are located here: <https://myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/ess-forms>.

You may also pick up, and submit, a paper application at the Department's Family Resource Centers. A complete list of Family Resource Centers is located here: <https://myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/FRC>.

The completed paper application can be mailed to ACCESS Central Mail Center, P.O. Box 1770, Ocala, FL, 34478-1770 or it can be faxed or hand delivered to a Family Resource Center.

How does SSI, Florida Department of Children and Families, and Med Waiver work together for services through Med Waiver? What is the process to be able to earn up to \$37,000 and keep your Med Waiver services?

Medicaid eligibility is determined by the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), except for recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Eligibility for SSI is determined by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Medicaid services are managed by the Agency for Healthcare Administration (AHCA). An individual receiving cash benefits from the SSA, SSI Program is automatically eligible for Medicaid. Florida currently administers four types of "Med Waivers" which are also known as Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Waivers. All HCBS Waivers have the same federal requirements for income and asset limits.

Information about the income and asset limits for SSI-related Medicaid coverage groups is located on DCF's website at: www.myflfamilies.com/sites/default/files/2024-06/Appendix-A-9.pdf

Information on the types of HCBS Waivers offered is located on the AHCA website at: <https://ahca.myflorida.com/medicaid/medicaid-policy-quality-and-operations/medicaid-policy-and-quality/medicaid-policy/florida-medicaid-s-covered-services-and-hcbs-waivers>

Can bullying start at home with family members? Why do people become bullies? Why do children and young adults never tell someone they trust about the bullying? Can bullying be controlled, prevented, stopped? I called DCF and they do not feel that bullying is a problem, and yet they confirmed that it is abuse. Especially for the IDD population.

Can bullying start at home?

Yes, bullying can happen anywhere. This type of bullying can be particularly damaging, as it occurs in a place where individuals should feel safe and supported. The effects of such bullying can extend into other areas of life, influencing how individuals interact with peers and authority figures outside the home.

Why Do People Become Bullies?

People may become bullies for various reasons, including a desire for power, insecurity, or learned behavior. Often, bullies have experienced bullying themselves or have been exposed to aggressive behavior in their environment, whether at home or in social settings.

Why Do Children and Young Adults Not Tell Someone They Trust About Bullying?

Children and young adults may hesitate to disclose bullying because they might fear retaliation from the bully, worry about being perceived as weak, or feel that their

concerns will not be taken seriously. Additionally, there can be a sense of shame or embarrassment associated with being bullied, leading them to suffer in silence. This silence can be particularly pronounced in vulnerable populations, such as those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), who may feel even more isolated.

Can Bullying Be Controlled, Prevented, or Stopped?

Yes, bullying can be controlled, prevented, and stopped through a combination of education, awareness, and intervention strategies. Creating a safe environment where children can thrive socially and academically is crucial. This involves teaching empathy, conflict resolution, and communication skills, as well as fostering open lines of communication between children and their parents. Schools and communities can implement anti-bullying programs that promote respect, which can significantly reduce instances of bullying. Advocacy for more comprehensive support and intervention strategies is essential to ensure that all forms of abuse, including bullying, are recognized, and addressed appropriately. If you suspect a child is being abused by a caregiver, please call 1-800-96-ABUSE.

How can people with a Disability adopt a kid or be a foster parent?

The adoption process is designed to ensure that individuals with various abilities can participate in providing loving homes for children in need. Prospective adoptive or foster parents must complete training and a home study. This process includes assessments of the home environment and the applicant's readiness to care for a child. Individuals can reach out to the Florida Department of Children and Families or their local Community Based Care agencies for guidance. [Child and Family Services | Florida DCF \(myflfamilies.com\)](https://myflfamilies.com) They can provide information on the necessary steps, resources, and support systems available for any individual interested in providing a safe, loving home for our children, including for those with disabilities. For more information on how to become a foster parent visit [Foster Care | Florida DCF \(myflfamilies.com\)](https://myflfamilies.com).

I seriously want to adopt or foster a child. I have a great job, making good money, have my own home and car. Yet everyone stops when they see me in a wheelchair. No one ever calls back or works with me. I would be a great parent.

The adoption process is designed to ensure that individuals with various abilities can participate in providing loving homes for children in need. Prospective adoptive or foster parents must complete training and a home study. This process includes assessments of the home environment and the applicant's readiness to care for a child. Individuals can reach out to the Florida Department of Children and Families or their local Community Based Care agencies for guidance. [Child and Family Services | Florida DCF \(myflfamilies.com\)](https://myflfamilies.com) They can provide information on the necessary steps, resources, and support systems available for any individual interested in providing a safe, loving home for our children, including for those with disabilities. For more information on how to become a foster parent visit [Foster Care | Florida DCF \(myflfamilies.com\)](https://myflfamilies.com)

Thank you for hosting a keynote session from Dr. Loyd. He was wonderful. I only wish that our state would openly, with intention, discuss the issues of the addicted. This is becoming such a common occurrence. We need to understand the mental health and physical health that drug use/addiction has on us all. Our family, our community, our state. Thank you DCF for speaking up on this issue.

Thank you for your feedback and recommendation. We are pleased that you enjoyed Dr. Loyd's presentation and look forward to providing more informative presentations in the future.

The Department of Children and Families (Department) shares your commitment to increasing knowledge on substance use. To support this, the Department contracts with the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association to provide free web-based trainings on a variety of topics to anyone interested. You can find more information on their website at https://www.fadaa.org/page/Training_Library, as well as you can create an account to access the online education platform for free online self-paced courses at <https://www.floridalearner.org/>.

If you are interested in getting involved locally, consider reaching out to Central Florida Cares Health System at 407-985-3560, the Managing Entity in your region, to inquire about opportunities for community engagement.

It scared me to death hearing about the human trafficking concerns for those with disabilities. The statistics and the victims. Stopped and made me think. I lost the names of the presenters and wanted to talk with them further about this. Can you send me the person's name that spoke from DCF?

Katia Coonan. Katia is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with an educational background in medicine, social work, and psychology, and extensive experience working with victims of human trafficking. Katia currently serves as the Statewide Human Trafficking Prevention Manager at the Florida Department of Children and Families. Katia can be reached at katia.coonan@myflfamilies.com.

How can the Department provide an easier way to get services from food stamps, SSDI, SSI, Medicaid insurance, etc. Not everyone has access to the internet. MYACCESS is good if you have access to a computer. Don't let me talk to you about using the library machine either. Those are for kids, and they provide no help.

The Department offers several ways to apply and manage government assistance:

1. Online: The quickest way to apply for Food Assistance or Medicaid is online through the MyACCESS portal <https://myaccess.myflfamilies.com/>, where you can apply, make changes to your case, or check your status. This can be done through a computer or smartphone.

2. In-person: The Department provides In-person assistance at the Family Resource Centers (FRC) and Community Partners. For a list of Family Resource Centers and Community Partners, please visit: <https://myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/FRC>.
3. Paper application: Individuals can fill out a paper application for Assistance or Cash Assistance, Family-related Medical Assistance, Relative Caregiver, Optional State Supplementation, or medical assistance for those 65 and over, Blind or Disabled, Medicaid Waiver/Home and Community Based Services, Hospice, or Nursing Home Care. Paper applications, along with other Department forms, are located here: <https://myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/ess-forms>.

You may also pick up, and submit, a paper application at the Department's Family Resource Centers. A complete list of Family Resource Centers is located here: <https://myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/FRC>.

The completed paper application can be mailed to ACCESS Central Mail Center, P.O. Box 1770, Ocala, FL, 34478-1770 or it can be faxed or hand delivered to a Family Resource Center.

The Department does not determine eligibility for SSI (Supplemental Security Income) or SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance). For these services, you will need to apply directly with the Social Security Administration.

Does the Department assist with child-care for those who have autism? I cannot find a qualified provider for my 3-year-old.

The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), in conjunction with other agencies such as the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) and Florida's Early Steps Program offer a range of services and resources to assist families with children who have autism. These include early intervention programs, support services, and financial assistance options, all aimed at fostering a supportive environment for children with autism and their families. For more information around childcare providers please visit [Child Care | Florida DCF \(myflfamilies.com\)](https://myflfamilies.com/child-care)

If you don't have access to a computer, it is too hard to find one, one that will let you download paperwork, etc. What ever happened to the centers around town? Where did they go?

The Gadsden Family Resource Center is located at 6 South Key Street in Quincy, Florida. A complete list of Family Resource Centers is located here: <https://myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/FRC>.

Additionally, Community Partners also offer in-person services. For more information about the Department's Community Partner Network and to find a list of available partners, please visit: <https://myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/community>

Are Social Security benefits determined through DCF? Do I get SSDI automatically when I apply thru DCF? If DCF gives me Food Stamps, will I automatically get Medicaid? What do I need to show to the worker to secure these services? Who do I call?

The Florida Department of Children and Families (Department) does not determine eligibility for SSI (Supplemental Security Income) or SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance). For these services, you will need to apply directly with the Social Security Administration.

When applying for government assistance with the Department, the individual will select the assistance for which they would like to apply. Food Assistance and Medicaid have separate eligibility requirements, but you can apply for both at the same time using the same application. Additional government assistance may be applied for after the initial application is submitted. The Department offers several ways to apply and manage government assistance:

1. Online: The quickest way to apply for Food Assistance or Medicaid is online through the MyACCESS portal <https://myaccess.myflfamilies.com/>, where you can apply, make changes to your case, or check your status. This can be done through a computer or smartphone.
2. In-person: The Department provides In-person assistance at Family Resource Centers (FRC) and Community Partners. For a list of Family Resource Centers and Community Partners, please visit: <https://myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/FRC>.
3. Paper application: Individuals can fill out a paper application for Food Assistance or Cash Assistance, Family-related Medical Assistance, Relative Caregiver, Optional State Supplementation, or medical assistance for those 65 and over, Blind or Disabled, Medicaid Waiver/Home and Community Based Services, Hospice, or Nursing Home Care. Paper applications, along with other Department forms, are located here: <https://myflfamilies.com/services/public-assistance/additional-resources-and-services/ess-forms>.

The completed paper application can be mailed to ACCESS Central Mail Center, P.O. Box 1770, Ocala, FL, 34478-1770 or it can be faxed or hand delivered to a Family Resource Center.

Why didn't anyone talk about Hope Florida? As a foster care youth, I wanted to learn more.

Hope Florida serves as a connection point for community collaboration between the public and private sector, faith-based communities, and nonprofits. Through the efforts of Hope Navigators, Hope Florida is going beyond government to create a pathway for Floridians to live up to their God-given potential and accomplish the American Dream – ultimately achieving prosperity and economic self-sufficiency.

Hope Navigators help individuals identify their needs, develop long-term goals, map out a path forward, and work to ensure all sectors of the community have a 'seat at the table' to be part of a lasting solution.

Floridians who are in need of support can connect with Hope Florida by visiting www.HopeFlorida.com or calling the Hope Line (833-GET-HOPE).

So, I came up and now out of the foster care system. I am going to college. Foster care was okay. But as I transition to college, there is no one there to assist with this new part of my life. Would help if I had help!

The Office of Continuing Care, offers free, one-on-one help for young people between the ages of 18-26 who are about to or have recently transitioned out of foster care, aiming to make the leap into adulthood a positive experience. OCC provides the following services: Connects youth to existing resources in their area to help them thrive as an independent young adult, assists youth and young adults in accessing special services available to them(including education), and gives youth and young adults a support system to help them with the next steps on their path to adulthood. In addition, OCC can provide information on post 18 programs that a young adult may qualify for. Those programs include:

Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS) Available to young adults ages 18-23 who aged out of foster care or who achieved permanency at ages 14-17 from foster care. Eligible young adults in PESS receive \$1,720 per month to secure housing while they attend post-secondary education at a Bright Futures Eligible institution.

Aftercare Support Services (AFC) Available to young adults ages 18-23 who aged out of foster care or who did not reunify with their parents after spending at least 6 months in out of home care after age 14. Aftercare is a short-term program intended to bridge into EFC or PESS or assist the young adult with achieving self-sufficiency. Services can include mentoring, tutoring, mental health, substance abuse, counseling, and financial assistance.

Extended Foster Care (EFC) Available to young adults ages 18-21 or 22 with a documented disability who aged out of foster care. EFC is a voluntary program that requires young adults to participate in school, work, or a work training program while residing in a supervised living arrangement. Services include regular case management visits, case planning, transition planning, monitoring of life skills development, judicial oversight, and financial assistance based on assessed needs.

An OCC Hope Navigator will be able to assist any young adult to determine eligibility and determine if there are any additional resources that the young adults may be eligible for.

The young adult can contact Hope Florida at 833-GET-HOPE for eligibility and more information.



The Department of Education

Districts are now giving out access points high school diplomas at 18 years old when a student has the right to go to school until 21/22 years old. Supplemental Security Income cuts the student's payments when they get the access points diploma. How do we stop this?

Rule 6A-1.09963, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.), High School Graduation Requirements for Students with Disabilities, states that students with disabilities, including students on access points-alternate academic achievement standards, are eligible to obtain a standard high school diploma once they meet all graduation requirements per section (s.) 1008.22, Florida Statutes (F.S.), Student assessment program for public schools.

A student with a disability who meets the standard high school diploma requirements may defer receipt of the diploma if the student has an individual educational plan (IEP) that prescribes special education, transition planning, transition services, or related services through 21 years of age and is enrolled in specified programs, as described in s. 1003.4282(8)(c), F.S. The IEP team must review the benefits of deferring the standard high school diploma, including continuation of educational and related services, and describe to the parent and the student all services and program options available to students who defer.

We encourage you to contact your district exceptional student education (ESE) director to address specific questions and program options available in the district. You can find a list of all district ESE directors at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.shtml>.

Why do the school districts in Florida refuse to provide the science-proven Orton-Gillingham teaching approach when a child does not learn to read for several years with the district's reading program?

Some districts in Florida do utilize the Orton-Gillingham teaching approach. Districts must develop a comprehensive evidence-based reading plan annually and make the plan available to the public. For more information, contact your local school district.

Neurofeedback therapy improves attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Why can school districts refuse to provide neurofeedback therapy and demand parents drug up their child? If a child has ADHD, then the IEP should approve and state neurofeedback therapy just like speech, occupational, and physical therapies.

Currently, neurofeedback therapy is not recognized as a standard related service under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

We encourage you to contact your district ESE director to address specific questions. You can find a list of all district ESE directors at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.shtml>.

Can we have a statute created and rules changed to allow training and credentialing of individuals to be qualified representatives for due process instead of at a judge's whim and opposed by school district attorneys?

Rule 6A-6.03311, F.A.C., Procedural Safeguards and Due Process Procedures for Parents and Students with Disabilities, provides that any party to a due process proceeding has the right to be represented by counsel or by a qualified representative, the qualifications and standards of which are addressed by Rules 28-106.106 and 28-106.107, F.A.C. These rules are promulgated by the Administration Commission. Revising the qualifications and standards of conduct for qualified representatives would require a change in state law and administrative rules not promulgated by FDOE. However, any party may also be accompanied and advised by individuals with special knowledge or training with respect to students with disabilities.

For more information regarding due process procedures, please review Rule 28-106.106, F.A.C., Who May Appear; Criteria for Qualified Representatives; Rule 28-106.107, F.A.C., Standards of Conduct for Qualified Representatives; and Rule 6A-6.03311, F.A.C., Procedural Safeguards and Due Process Procedures for Parents and Students with Disabilities.

Why doesn't the FDOE help parents on scholarships to have a way to get transition services, since local school districts won't offer or sell these to us and Project 10: Transition Education Network (Project 10) training isn't available to parents homeschooling or utilizing private schools? Same for making clear that students can defer graduation and work on life skills, social skills, etc. Too many parents are unaware and their kids miss out, especially homeschoolers.

FDOE is committed to ensuring students have access to essential transition services and postsecondary opportunities. Project 10, an IDEA-funded state project of the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEES), provides supports to prepare students for postsecondary transitions. The Planning for Postsecondary Section of the Project 10 website provides information and resources for school professionals, students and families to support them in planning and understanding postsecondary options for students with disabilities. This information can be found on Project 10's website at <http://project10.info/DPage.php?ID=327>.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) assists individuals with disabilities with getting or keeping a job through help from qualified placement providers. These providers work with the individual to find them a job that meets their employment goal. Beginning at age 14,

students with disabilities can connect with VR for pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS). VR works with students, their families, and their schools and community partners to enrich transition planning. In addition, VR supports students in gaining the knowledge and experiences necessary to make informed decisions about their future. We encourage you to reach out to your local VR office to request assistance. To find the office closest to you, visit VR's Area Offices webpage at <https://www.rehabworks.org/contact/area-offices.html>.

Make Florida a two-tier due process hearing system. Florida Administrative Law judges are biased. A parent has only a 20% chance of being allowed to have a due process hearing. A parent has less than a 2% chance of winning. When a parent loses a due process hearing, they should be able to go to the state review officer instead of federal court.

IDEA prescribes the requirements and procedures for a due process complaint and hearing. Before a due process complaint proceeds to a hearing, the complaint must be legally sufficient, as defined by IDEA, and the parties must participate in a resolution process, unless both parties agree to waive resolution. The vast majority of due process complaints are resolved during the resolution process, thereby avoiding the need to hold a due process hearing.

However, when a complaint does proceed to hearing, due process hearings are conducted on behalf of the FDOE by administrative law judges (ALJ) from the Division of Administrative Hearings. The ALJs are qualified to conduct hearings and render written decisions, are impartial, and have knowledge specific to IDEA and federal and state regulations related to IDEA. As permitted by IDEA, if a party is dissatisfied with an ALJ's decision, the party may appeal the ALJ's decision by bringing a civil action in federal district or state court.

In addition to due process proceedings, Florida provides the opportunity for organizations or individuals to file a state complaint directly with the FDOE. While this process is not available to appeal an ALJ's decision, it can be utilized if an organization or individual is alleging that a district has violated federal or state requirements regarding the education of a student or students with disabilities. For more information about the state complaint process, please visit the ESE Dispute Resolution Systems website at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/dispute-resolution/visit>.

There are accommodations for the high-functioning students with disabilities in colleges. This is a mandate. There are modifications in higher education for the complex profound persons with disabilities. But where is the help for those students who want to attend college who are more in the middle? What is being done to fill the gap for accessibility for students who are in the middle of the spectrum? What can professors and college presidents and trustees do to be more inclusive to all?

Florida's state colleges are required to provide accommodations and support services under both Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act

for students who disclose their disability to the institution. For more information, please visit the FDOE Division of Florida Colleges' Student with Disability Support Services website at <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/higher-ed/fl-college-system/student-services/disability-support-services.stml>.

Families of children with special needs face unique challenges, particularly when it comes to securing adequate care outside of school hours. Given the increasing demand for such services, can you talk about the availability of funding for before- and after-care programs specifically tailored for children with special needs?

In Florida, while there is recognition of the unique needs of children with disabilities, the availability of specialized before- and after-care programs varies by district and community. Some districts and community organizations offer afterschool programs specifically tailored to support children with special needs, including programs focusing on social skills, behavior management and life skills.

For families seeking support outside of school hours, we recommend contacting local school districts, community centers and private service providers who may have resources or can refer you to potential funding opportunities. Additionally, families can explore funding through Medicaid waivers or other state programs that may assist with the cost of care outside of school hours.

As children with special needs and their parents/legal guardians continue to age, are there plans to develop planned communities to meet the needs of elderly parents and their aging children with special needs so that they don't have to be separated? Can we begin the discussions on the IEP in schools? Parents need to be able to discuss options with their children early in the process. Schools are where to begin.

Schools play an important role in preparing students with disabilities for their future through transition planning, required as part of the IEP process beginning at age 12 under s. 1003.5716, F.S., Transition to postsecondary education and career opportunities. These discussions can include independent living, long-term housing and decision-making support.

Florida recognizes supported decision-making as a vital approach to empowering individuals with disabilities to make their own choices with guidance from trusted supporters. Schools may introduce this concept during IEP team meetings to help families explore alternatives to guardianship, ensuring students retain autonomy while receiving necessary support.

Schools may connect families with resources such as the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities and other local organizations that support independent living and decision-making options.

We encourage you to work with your child’s IEP team to start these discussions early, ensuring they are equipped for a successful transition to adulthood.

Our children are getting the wrong message—being told that gambling or the lottery is providing their education. Now, if we don’t approve marijuana sales, we can’t educate kids through the FDOE? Again, horrible message encouraging legalizing drug sales! Message should be—drugs produce impaired thinking and driving!

The Facts. Your Future., which First Lady DeSantis launched in December 2019, is a program that directly engages youth in Florida to improve their understanding of the life-altering effects of drug abuse and empowers teens to reach their full potential. *The Facts. Your Future.* provides an interactive space for schools to educate their students on the consequential impacts of substance abuse.

Schools statewide are provided the necessary resources to host their own assemblies, alongside materials to continue essential conversations throughout the school year. By engaging with peers directly through schools, parents and educators, this initiative focuses on direct channels that foster healthy conversations about the facts around substance use.

For more information, please contact your local school district or visit <https://www.fldoe.org/thefactsyourfuture/>.

How come the State of Florida does not have a Board of Music Therapy? Having a Board of Music Therapy within the FDOE will open doors in the private sector to pay for and create a more robust program of music therapy.

There are various state agencies that regulate professions and occupations. FDOE does not license music therapists.

We encourage you to contact your district ESE director to address specific questions and program options available in the district. You can find a list of all district ESE directors at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.stml>.

Why doesn’t the FDOE offer more information about the Division of Blind Services (DBS)? What a great little-known resource.

FDOE is committed to providing support and services to our students with visual impairments. An abundance of information regarding the Florida DBS can be found at <https://dbs.fldoe.org/>.

DBS provides services to individuals of all ages, from infants to senior citizens whose primary disability is visual impairment, to help them maximize their physical, vocational, social and economic well-being. Services include vocational rehabilitation, counseling,

guidance, parent training, transition services, independent living, employer services, and assistance locating schools and other community-based programs.

My son will be graduating from high school next week and there it all stops!! Why doesn't the school offer programs for him after high school?

FDOE is committed to ensuring students have access to essential transition services and postsecondary opportunities. Project 10 provides supports to prepare students for postsecondary transitions. The Planning for Postsecondary Education section of the Project 10 website provides information and resources for school professionals, students and families to support them in planning and understanding postsecondary options for students with disabilities. This information can be found at <http://project10.info/DPage.php?ID=327>.

VR assists individuals with disabilities with getting or keeping a job through help from qualified placement providers. These providers work with the individual to find them a job that meets their employment goal. Beginning at age 14, students with disabilities can connect with VR for Pre-ETS. VR works with students, their families and their schools and community partners to enrich transition planning. In addition, VR supports students in gaining the knowledge and experiences necessary to make informed decisions about their future. We encourage you to reach out to your local VR office to request assistance. To find the office closest to you, visit VR's Area Offices webpage at <https://www.rehabworks.org/contact/area-offices.html>.

We encourage you to contact your district ESE director to address specific questions and program options available in the district. You can find a list of all district ESE directors at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.stml>.

We have an IEP apparently, but I have never had a "team" meeting. I just found out that I have all these rights/roles/responsibilities that were never discussed with me or my child.

We encourage you to contact your district ESE director to address specific questions in the district. You can find a list of all district ESE directors at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.stml>. For further support, contact BEESS at BEESSsupport@fldoe.org or 850-245-0475.

I just love the presentation by the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS) staff about the facilitated IEP process. It was very informative. Thank you!

Thank you for your comment.

Drew Andrews’s presentation was very informative! I want to have my son go to college and this presentation was so helpful. Thank you Drew.

Thank you for your comment.

I would like to see more presentations for the school system available in Spanish. I needed all the information, but it was difficult to get in English.

We encourage you to contact your district ESE director to address specific questions and assistance to access information within the district. You can find a list of all district ESE directors at <https://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/staff/ese-directors.shtml>.

I come to The Family Café and learn so much, like today I learned that I have rights with my IEP. I never knew. Counselors should let students know. My parents never told me . . . neither did the school.

Thank you for your comment. If you need assistance at this time, please contact BEESS at BEESSsupport@fldoe.org or 850-245-0475.

There was only one session that I saw on school safety. I think that the system should provide more information, whether we like it or not, because bad things happen all the time. We should have a plan. Be aware!

School safety is a top priority of the FDOE. Florida’s schools are required to comply with comprehensive safety measures, including the following:

- A designated school safety specialist in every school district, responsible for the supervision and oversight for all school safety and security personnel, policies and procedures (s. [1006.07](#), F.S.);
- Armed safe-school officers at every district school facility (s. [1006.12](#), F.S.);
- FortifyFL, a mobile suspicious activity reporting tool where anyone can report to school officials and local law enforcement simultaneously (s. [943.083](#), F.S.);
- Extensive preparedness efforts, including emergency planning and drills (s. [1006.07](#), F.S.);
- Alyssa’s Alert, which is a mobile panic alert system that communicates to local first-responder agencies in the event of an emergency (s. [1006.07](#), F.S.);
- Stringent access control requirements (such as locked gates and doors) to prevent unauthorized access to campuses (s. [1006.07](#), F.S.); and
- The Florida Harm Prevention and Threat Management Model, a robust process for addressing threats and concerning behaviors (s. [1006.07](#), F.S.).

For more information, please contact your local school district’s safety office or visit the FDOE Safe Schools website at <https://www.fldoe.org/safe-schools/>.

How can parents join the “committee” within the FDOE to provide practical sense and input into the education process?

Parents may apply to join the State Advisory Panel by emailing the FDOE at ESEParentServices@fldoe.org.

I enjoyed hearing the FDOE heads, especially the FDOE Bureau Chief, speak. She talked to us about our issues long after her presentation. Thank you!

Thank you for your comment.

I would like to see the FDOE spend more time on basic financial resources skills and literacy. If you cannot read or balance your account, you are in trouble.

Senate Bill 1054 established the “Dorothy L. Hukill Financial Literacy Act,” which requires that, beginning with students who entered ninth grade in the 2023-24 school year, students are required to earn a one-half credit in personal financial literacy and money management to receive a standard high school diploma.

Can the schools offer sign language as a foreign language? It would be wonderful if all students had the ability to learn to communicate with others who need to be heard.

Under s. 1007.2615, F.S., American Sign Language is recognized as a world language and can be offered to students to meet foreign language credit requirements for high school graduation and college admissions.

For more information, contact your local school district for course options.

I wish more parents knew of the benefits of FDLRS in their local school districts. You should let families know of the trainings and resources available by this program.

Thank you for your comment. For more information, please visit the FDLRS website at <https://www.fdlrs.org/>.

Please have more education sessions available in Spanish.

Thank you for your comment.

The Department of Health

Why aren't there more resources for spine, bone, and respiratory illness in the CMS district offices available?

Thank you for inquiring about the availability of resources for spine, bone, and respiratory illnesses in your area. The Department of Health, Children's Medical Services offers a statewide system of care and can help link families with resources to meet their specific needs. For more information about CMS programs, please visit our webpage at <https://www.sunshinehealth.com/members/cms/your-childs-diagnosis.html>.

Additionally, the Department of Health's Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Program (BSCIP) Resource Center offers a toll-free helpline, available Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. You can reach the BSCIP Resource Center at 1-866-313-2940 or visit their website at <https://bscipresourcecenter.org/> to view resources related to brain and spinal cord injuries.

For information on respiratory illnesses and prevention in Florida, please visit the Florida Department of Health Respiratory Illness webpage at <https://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/respiratory-illness/index.html>.

Loved the Club Café for my kids, and the fact that his sister could attend with him and provide assistance. My questions are why don't you do more for youth in transition from the doctor's office visit towards independence? His doctor, now that he is out of the CMS care, seems scared and standoff-ish when it comes to his care. This frightens me! I need someone who can research issues, provide care and not tell me that they are not a disability doctor. As, what the heck is a disability doctor anyway. So, we remain fearful and suspicious of his care regime. Yes, we are on Medicaid for his care.

Thank you for sharing your concerns about your child's transition from pediatric health care. We understand this can be a challenging time, and we want to assure you that we are here to support you.

The Children's Medical Services (CMS) Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) Program focuses on helping young people transition to adult health care. You can find valuable resources for youth, families, and professionals on our Florida Youth to Adult Transition (FLY2AT) webpage at <https://www.floridahats.org/>. This page includes information about the FLY2AT Course for Professionals, which might be helpful for your child's doctor.

We also offer a free, one-hour training course on whole-person transition, emphasizing health care transition, for all professionals working with youth and young adults.

Each CMS care office should have someone who presents and explains some options for those families who have children with mental health concerns. Therapy is never offered, yet much needed.

Thank you for your feedback about the availability of mental health resources for children with mental health care needs.

The CMS Plan offers a range of programs and services, including comprehensive mental and behavioral health services that can help with issues you and your family may be facing.

If you are a CMS Plan member, here is how you can access behavioral health services:

- Call 1-866-799-5321, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., to speak with a customer service representative.
- Visit the CMS Plan website at <https://www.sunshinehealth.com/members/cms.html> for more information.

I did not see a presentation about KidCare this year. Is the program still available? How about the Healthy Kids initiative, Early Start?

Thank you for your inquiry about Florida KidCare.

Florida KidCare is the state's affordable, high-quality health and dental insurance program for children from birth to 18 years. Florida Healthy Kids offers comprehensive health services for children ages 5 to 18 who are not Medicaid-eligible.

For more information about Florida KidCare and Florida Healthy Kids, we encourage you to visit: HealthyKids.org or call 1-888-540-KIDS (5437) to speak with a customer service representative.

What ever happened to the Covid-19 concern? Are we out in the clear now with the pandemic? Do we continue to use masks? I saw folks here with masks on. Not that I wanted to wear one, but I was wondering if we are still so concerned with the pandemic issues, or is this just going to be like the flu?

The Florida Department of Health continues to monitor statewide trends for respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus.

While Florida has lifted the mandate for face coverings or masks, individuals can choose to wear them based on their personal circumstances.

For more information on prevention in Florida, please visit the respiratory illnesses section of the Florida Department of Health website at <https://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/respiratory-illness/index.html>.

The helpers in the playgroup with my small child were wonderful. I wish I had known about the Early Steps program earlier. My doctors did not refer me to anyone although I was in the hospital for 57 days with my baby before they allowed her to go home. Please get the word out about these helpful moms.

Thank you for sharing your positive experience with the Early Wishes playgroup. We're so glad the helpers were wonderful with your child!

Anyone can refer a child (birth to 36-months) to Florida's Early Steps program, including health care providers, parents, caregivers, family members, friends, and others. Early intervention can make a significant difference in a child's development, and we strive to reach families as early as possible. The Florida Department of Health's Children's Medical Services Early Steps Program continually expands its efforts to increase Child Find initiatives and educate both providers and families about eligibility and available services—all at no cost to families.

We encourage you to visit our website at <https://floridaearlysteps.com/> to learn more about the Early Steps program and how it can support you and your child. We would also love for you to join us next year at The 27th Annual Family Café! We'll have engaging activities for children of all ages and valuable resources for families.

I found out that my baby had issues when screened at the hospital. I wanted to tell more families about this service. How one screening can get additional testing that will really help. I think you should do a session on this. Scary, but necessary.

Thank you for sharing your experience and highlighting the importance of newborn screening. We appreciate your suggestion to provide more information to families. Your suggestion is aligned with our goal to offer an overview of newborn screening in Florida at the 27th Annual Family Café next year. This overview might help families understand the benefits of the Newborn Screening Program and the support available to them.

In the meantime, we encourage you to learn more about the program by visiting our website at <https://floridanewbornscreening.com/hearing/early-hearing-and-intervention-programs/>, calling us at 850-245-4201, or emailing us at CMS.NBS@FLHealth.gov.

My baby was born with congenital hearing loss. I was prepared. The early intervention program was also prepared to help and provide care. Please let more families know.

We are so glad to hear about your positive experience with early intervention services for your child.

The Department of Health's Children's Medical Services Newborn Hearing Screening (NBHS) Program, also known as the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program, provides information and resources to families across Florida. At the Family Café, the NBHS Program shares information about hearing screening, diagnosis, early intervention, and parent-to-parent support. We will also explore providing a comprehensive overview of the early hearing detection and intervention system at The 27th Annual Family Café.

For additional resources, we encourage families to visit the NBHS Program website at <https://floridanewbornscreening.com/hearing/early-hearing-and-intervention-programs/>, call 850-245-4201, or email CMS.NBS@FLHealth.gov.

There should be a line, like suicide prevention line, for new parents. Somewhere they can call in the middle of the day/night when they are scared, frustrated, or confused. Like a nurse or a mom who can help with her problems when they have them so they do not feel so isolated.

We understand that new parents may feel overwhelmed and need immediate support. The Department of Health offers the free Family Health Line at 1-800-451-BABY (2229). This hotline provides counseling, information, and community referrals related to pregnancy, infants, and toddlers. It's available Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 10:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

In the event you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. We encourage you to explore these additional resources that offer support and guidance:

- The Department of Health's Healthy Start program provides various services to pregnant women and families with young children, including parenting education, home visits, stress management education and connection to community resources. You can learn more about the program by visiting Health's Healthy Start webpage: <https://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/childrens-health/healthy-start/index.html>.
- The 988 Florida Lifeline, managed by the Department of Children and Families, is a free behavioral health support service that connects Floridians experiencing suicidal thoughts, substance use disorder, mental health crises, or any other kind of emotional distress to a trained crisis counselor. Available 24/7 by **phone or text at 988 or via chat at [988lifeline.org/chat](https://www.myflfamilies.com/988), the service is provided by Florida-based organizations.** For more information, visit: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/988>.

I would like to know more about the Family Leader's Network. I forgot to ask for contact information. I strive to help others.

Thank you for your interest in the Florida Family Leader Network (FFLN)! We appreciate your intent to help others.

The FFLN is a program within the Department of Health, Children’s Medical Services, Title V Program. FFLN connects parents of children with special health care needs and varying disabilities, professionals, and emerging leaders. FFLN provides a platform for learning, advocacy, and community engagement.

FFLN emphasizes the power of family voice, community engagement, and leveraging of state and national resources. FFLN also provides:

- Networking opportunities across an array of social media platforms.
- An annual summit providing in-person networking and leadership skills development.
- Webinars focused on topics that develop strong family-professional partnerships.

To learn more, and to contact the FFLN, please visit website at FloridaLeaders.org.

What type of intervention programs does the Department offer for young families? Do we have to use our own doctors? I cannot find a doctor that can provide the care needed that I trust and like. Can CMS help? Or is this an income program? I was in the playgroup and the ladies there were wonderful and so welcoming. I would like to know more about the early intervention program.

We understand how important it is to find a doctor you trust and can provide the care your child needs.

Early Steps provides early intervention services to eligible infants and toddlers, from birth to 36-months, with developmental delays, disabilities, and at-risk conditions—at no cost to families. We have a network of early intervention providers, including speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, and infant-toddler developmental specialists. While Early Steps offers therapy, education, and support designed to help children reach their full potential, it is not a medical program and does not provide primary care services . To refer a child to the program, you can contact your local Early Steps office or submit an online referral form at <https://floridaearlysteps.com/make-a-referral/>. You can also find more information about the Early Steps services on our website at FloridaEarlySteps.com. We’re glad you enjoyed the Early Wishes playgroup, and we hope to see you again next year at The 27th Annual Family Café.

If services are free for early intervention, why does the worker ask me to complete an eligibility form?

Florida’s Early Steps Program provides early intervention services to eligible infants and toddlers, from birth to 36-months, with developmental delays, disabilities and at-risk conditions. Early Steps is available to all eligible children, regardless of income or insurance. Services are provided at no cost to families.

To be enrolled in Early Steps, your child must first be found eligible. A child may be eligible if he or she has been diagnosed with an established condition that may result in a

developmental delay, or if the child is found to have a developmental delay through the Early Steps assessment process.

Also, the Early Steps Program is a “payor of last resort” program. This means, all available funding sources, like private insurance or Medicaid, should be billed for services before state or federal Part C funds are used. Families must provide consent for the use of private insurance or Medicaid. By allowing insurance to be billed first, you’re helping to extend Early Steps’ services to other families.

To learn more about the Early Steps Program and eligibility, or to connect with your Local Early Steps office, visit [FloridaEarlySteps.com](https://floridaearlysteps.com).

How can I learn more about the Early Intervention Program? How do I know if I qualify or not? This is our first child and we are concerned about autism type behaviors.

Early diagnosis of autism is important because it means children can benefit from therapies and supports from an early developmental stage. Early Steps is a program that provides free early intervention services to eligible infants and toddlers (from birth to 36-months) who show signs of developmental delays, disabilities, or at-risk conditions. To learn more about the program and determine if your child is eligible, we recommend contacting your local Early Steps office. You can find your local Early Steps office on the Florida Early Steps website, visit <https://floridaearlysteps.com/contact/>.

I spoke to Ms. Rose and she suggested that I join the group FICCIT. I have heard of this group, but do not actually know if they provide guidance or direct services. Who is represented on the group? Any information if parents can join would be helpful. Thank you!

Thank you for your interest in the Florida Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers (FICCIT). While FICCIT does not provide direct services to families, it plays an essential role in guiding and advising. The council is composed of governor-appointed members who are representative of the state’s population. You can find more information about the council, its current membership, and the application process on the Early Steps FICCIT webpage, visit <https://floridaearlysteps.com/florida-interagency-coordinating-council-for-infants-and-toddlers/>.

More families would be prepared for parenting if they knew of such programs like Healthy Start. I remember when the program first was introduced. My family was a recipient of services and provided my family with resources and care. Don’t hear much about this program anymore, but low birth rate babies are on the increase. Might be time to go back to basics. Tell us where to get care.

Thank you for your suggestion! You’re right, many families could benefit from learning about the valuable resources the Department of Health’s Healthy Start program provides,

including parenting education. You can access Healthy Start through local health departments or health care providers. To find a Healthy Start program near you, visit the Department of Health’s Healthy Start webpage at

<https://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/childrens-health/healthy-start/index.html> and select “Find a Healthy Start Coalition Location Near You.”

In addition to Healthy Start, the Family Health Line is another excellent resource available to Florida families. This toll-free hotline provides counseling, information, and community referrals for pregnancy, infant, and toddler issues. They can answer questions about pregnancy, breastfeeding, childbirth education, and connect you with relevant resources in your community.

The Family Health Line is available Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 10:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. You can reach them by calling 1-800-451-BABY (2229).



The Division of Emergency Management

Why can't there be more programs to help low-income disabled people prepare for hurricanes in advance of storms and for more help with disaster relief after storms? We still have Idalia damage.

Residents with disabilities should register with the State Special Needs Registry. The statewide registry provides first responders with valuable information to prepare for disasters or other emergencies. Residents with disabilities can sign up for the State Special Needs Registry with the Florida Department of Health at SNR.FLHealthResponse.com/.

Hope Florida is a program that seeks to connect residents with help and resources after a disaster. Residents can go to HopeFlorida.com to apply for assistance or call the helpline at 1-800-GET-HOPE.

I have viewed your website many times, you used to have resources and services related to individuals with disabilities on your site. Where did it move to?

The website FloridaDisaster.org has many resources to assist residents with their disaster preparedness and compile assistance resources. For residents with disabilities, they should register with the Special Needs Registry, which is linked at FloridaDisaster.org/SNR. We also have an entire section on Disaster Preparedness for Access and Functional Needs in our Hurricane Guide which can be downloaded by visiting FloridaDisaster.org/Guide.

I wish that more information was posted when we are in need of specific special needs shelters. They always post about pet friendly shelters, but not about working pet centers. I just go to the hospital with my service dog, and he stays with me, until someone takes me to the shelter. I wish I knew which one was available beforehand, so I could go myself.

At FloridaDisaster.org/Shelters there will be a live list and map of shelters open. This list will also break down by county and which shelters are for those with special needs or whether they are pet friendly. From there, residents could call ahead to the shelter they are interested in with any specific questions.

How do we learn about what we need to shelter in place?

After determining whether you need to evacuate or not based on your evacuation zone which you can determine at [FloridaDisaster.org/Know](https://www.floridadisaster.org/Know) and whether you are under an evacuation order which you can find at [FloridaDisaster.org/EvacuationOrders](https://www.floridadisaster.org/EvacuationOrders), then you can determine if you can shelter in place. Proper preparedness includes building your disaster supply kit. This kit should have enough food, medicine, water and supplies to sustain each member of a household for at least 7 days. You can find a checklist of items to include at [FloridaDisaster.org/Kit](https://www.floridadisaster.org/Kit).

Who helps those who cannot go get water, sand, supplies? I call the police, and they tell me to call my church. I don't have a temple or church in town to call.

211 can help residents get connected with local resources that may be able to assist them. Residents should also contact their local emergency management agency, which may also be able to assist residents as they prepare. You can find your local emergency management website at [FloridaDisaster.org/Counties](https://www.floridadisaster.org/Counties).

What can this "Hope Florida" do for us in case of a Hurricane emergency?

Serving as the emergency response arm for the Hope Florida initiative, Activate Hope (hopeflorida.com/get-help/hurricanerecovery.html) pulls together the private sector, nonprofits, and government resources to help Floridians get back on their feet following a natural disaster. Activate Hope helps connect Floridians with outside resources to provide food, household goods, home repairs, and more.

What does it mean not to follow an emergency evacuation? Can you receive a citation for staying back and not evacuating?

Not following an emergency evacuation order is dangerous and means you are knowingly putting yourself at risk. You don't need to evacuate hundreds of miles to be in a safer location. There will be free shelters open that can accommodate the needs of any resident that is ordered to evacuate. You can find open shelters at [FloridaDisaster.org/Shelters](https://www.floridadisaster.org/Shelters) and any evacuation orders that are in place at [FloridaDisaster.org/EvacuationOrders](https://www.floridadisaster.org/EvacuationOrders).

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Are there any opportunities for people who have disabilities such as cerebral palsy to be an investigative reporter or something in the investigation field? Until this date, there are no positions for investigations for individuals with disabilities. Can VR help?

VR offers a wide range of services to assist individuals with varying disabilities to achieve meaningful employment. VR has a number of services available to make becoming employed more attainable—including in the investigation field. VR counselors learn about how individuals' disabilities affect their ability to work and assist them with determining a job goal based on their skills, abilities and interests. Because VR customizes the services each person receives, the best first step is to have a discussion with your VR counselor. If you are not yet a VR customer, learn more about how to apply for services by visiting Rehabworks.org.

When should you apply for VR services and or SSDI?

A person with a disability, at least 14 years of age, can apply for VR services at any time. Individuals interested in receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) should apply when they have met the criteria for that type of assistance. VR serves individuals with and without SSDI as they plan for and obtain employment.

How can you better promote the growth of people with disabilities or executive functioning in a job setting? What accommodations can be provided?

VR provides an array of employment supports and job placement assistance to eligible individuals with disabilities. VR counselors work with their customers to determine which services are necessary to be successful in finding, obtaining and maintaining employment. Services include, but are not limited to, assistive technology aids or devices, transportation services, vehicle modifications, psychological counseling, medical services, and job placement assistance. To learn more about how VR can help, find your local VR office at Rehabworks.org and schedule an appointment with a counselor.

I started working and receive SSI. When do I apply for SSDI and how can you still qualify for benefits?

Individuals interested in receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) should apply when they have met the criteria for that type of assistance. VR helps coordinate benefits

planning services for customers who work and receive SSI/SSDI to ensure they can make informed decisions about employment.

Where are there more resources on teaching people with developmental disabilities how to drive, or to determine if they are ready to learn to drive? Are there VR simulators available in the state that can help with this?

VR has a number of services available for customers to make becoming employed more attainable—including driver training. If you are a current VR customer, we encourage you to speak with your counselor about your needs. If you are not yet a customer and want to learn more about VR services, visit our website at [Rehabworks.org](https://www.Rehabworks.org).

I did not have a very helpful experience with the Vocational Rehab disability services. I followed the directions. No one ever returned my calls. I had to wait over two years before I got a reply. I had to find an appropriate program for my daughter myself.

Thank you for attending The Family Café and sharing your concern with us. We're sorry to learn that you had difficulties with accessing VR services.

We encourage you to reach out to the Unit Supervisor of the closest VR office or to the Area Director in the Administrative Office for your region. You can find all the contact information you'll need on [Rehabworks.org](https://www.Rehabworks.org). You may also contact the VR Ombudsman Office toll free at 866-515-3692 or by email at Ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org. The Ombudsman is an impartial service available to any VR customer who has questions, concerns or believes they did not get the services they expected. The Ombudsman listens and helps in resolving complaints.

I'm looking for a friend/companion for my 22 year old daughter with InD/cognitive delay. Are there programs that might help with social skills, advocacy skills, and life skills here in Miami Dade county?

The Center for Independent Living South Florida is a great resource, offering a wide variety of services to assist individuals with disabilities, including peer support and independent living skills. We encourage you to check out their website at [Center for Independent Living of South Florida \(cilsf.org\)](https://www.CenterforIndependentLivingofSouthFlorida.org). The center is located at 4770 Biscayne Boulevard, Suite 150, Miami and can be contacted by telephone at (305) 751-8025 or by email at info@cilsf.org.

How can a blind person get a caregiver without being on APD? They need services to help them get around.

The Division of Blind Services helps blind and visually impaired Floridians achieve their goals and live productive and independent lives. If you are interested in learning more

about the services they provide, visit the Florida Division of Blind Services online at <https://dbs.fldoe.org/> or call toll free 800-342-1828.

My son just graduated from High School and wants to go to college. We need help in continuing his education. I never, until I came here, knew about Vocational Rehabilitation. He has an IEP for his dyslexia. Never spoke to a counselor, teacher, or principal that spoke to us about his "transition youth program." It would be nice if the schools could share this information about VR with the students, or at least the counselors so us parents could help to research these programs.

For individuals considering college, university or technical school in order to prepare for employment, VR may be able to help. VR counselors work with the Office of Student Disability, at your institution of choice, to coordinate the accommodations you need to be successful in obtaining your degree or certification. Additionally, VR may be able to provide financial assistance for eligible individuals working toward an employment goal. For graduates, VR can assist with on-the-job training, job search and placement. We encourage you to reach out to your local VR office to request assistance. To find the office closest to you, visit [VR Office Listing](#).

After we complete the Referral form, how long does it usually take before an employee or VR office take to get back to us? We completed the form. Mailed it. Six weeks later and we have heard nothing.

Thank you for attending The Family Café and sharing your concern with us. We take your issue very seriously, because we know good communication throughout the process is key to success.

Please know that if you ever have such a challenge, you can reach out to the Unit Supervisor for that office or to the Area Director in the Administrative Office for your region. You can find all the contact information you'll need on Rehabworks.org. You may also contact the VR Ombudsman Office toll free at 866-515-3692 or by email at Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org.

How old must the student be before they apply for VR services?

Beginning at age 14, students with disabilities can connect with VR for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). VR works with students, their families, their schools and community partners to enrich transition planning. In addition, VR supports students in gaining the knowledge and experiences necessary to make informed decisions about their future.

My counselor (?) and I do not agree with each other on what services I need/want. She suggested that I talk with the ombudsman person because she said they would help me with our disagreement. Can I get a new counselor?

Thank you for attending the Family Café and sharing your concern with us. We take your issue very seriously, because we know good communication throughout the process is key to success.

If you ever have a challenge, you can reach out to the Unit Supervisor for that office or to the Area Director in the Administrative Office in the Area for your region. You can find all the contact information you'll need on Rehabworks.org. You may also contact the VR Ombudsman Office toll free at 866-515-3692 or by email at Ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org. The Ombudsman is an impartial service available to any VR customer who has questions, concerns or believes they did not get the services they expected. The Ombudsman listens and helps in resolving complaints.

We wish you well and are committed to these services making a difference in your journey towards a career.

We, as parents, have been unsuccessful in getting my son to keep a job. He needs a job coach/buddy/partner. He is quiet. Does not like to be alone, but also does not talk. He likes to do what others do, and he can learn if someone takes the time to teach him. You at VR tell me that he is unemployable. I do not think this is true or fair. Who should we go talk to about this? Do I call the VR Director in Tallahassee?

Thank you for sharing your concern with us. If you are interested in changing your son's counselor, you can reach out to the Unit Supervisor for assistance. Additionally, you can find the contact information for the Area Director in your region by visiting Rehabworks. The VR Ombudsman's Office is another option that may be helpful as well. The Ombudsman is an impartial service available to any VR customer who has questions, concerns or believes they did not get the services they expected. The Ombudsman listens and helps in resolving complaints. They can be contacted by calling toll free at 866-515-3692 or by email at Ombudsman@vr.fl DOE.org.

What is Project SEARCH? Do we have one in Pensacola? I heard someone talk about it and it sounds like something we should know about.

Project SEARCH is a nine-month transition-to-work internship program for people with disabilities. It is targeted for individuals whose goal is competitive employment. The program takes place in a business-led setting where total immersion in the workplace facilitates the teaching and learning process through hands-on training and the acquisition of employability and marketable work skills. Interns participate in three internships to explore a variety of career paths. The interns work throughout the year with a team that includes their family, an instructor and local and state agencies to create an employment goal. The outcome of this one-year program is competitive, integrated employment.

Currently, there are 2 Project SEARCH sites in the Pensacola area. For more information, contact your local VR office. A list of offices is located at: [Florida VR offices www.rehabworks.org/contact/area-offices.html](http://FloridaVRofficeswww.rehabworks.org/contact/area-offices.html).

I want a job, but I will need a scooter because I cannot walk long distances. Can VR help me to have a work scooter?

When it comes to assistive technology, there is no "one size fits all," which is why VR sends eligible customers in need of accommodations or medical equipment for a rehabilitation technology assessment. Working with a qualified Rehab Engineer, you and your counselor will find the right solution for you and your work environment. We encourage you to reach out to your local VR office to request assistance. To find the office closest to you, visit [VR Offices www.rehabworks.org/contact/area-offices.html](http://VROfficeswww.rehabworks.org/contact/area-offices.html).

So I need assistance in the restroom. Does VR provide accommodations to the work place restrooms? I am currently working, but my wheelchair does not fit in the restroom area. I would like to work full time, but I cannot keep myself all day. My employer does not have the funding for the bathroom. He tells me to go home or to the McDonalds down the street to use the facilities there.

VR's Business Relations representatives assist employers with determining possible solutions for providing appropriate accommodations, including tax credits that could be used to fund modifications. Your employer can contact them through the Abilities Work Help Desk by phone at 844-245-3405 or email at AbilitiesWorkHD@vr.fl.doe.org. Additionally, if you are currently a VR customer, you can talk to your counselor about a possible workplace modification.

How do I find out about the job fairs? You say they happen all the time in Dade County, but I have never heard of them. Do you have a job agency?

Vocational Rehabilitation assists individuals with disabilities with getting or keeping a job through help from qualified placement providers. These providers work with the individual to find them a job that meets their employment goal.

Many of the job fairs in Miami are posted on the Miami-Dade County web page. They have job fairs monthly for all to attend. Miami-Dade College (MDC) also has quarterly job fairs as well as Florida International University (FIU). You can also contact any of the [Miami VR offices www.rehabworks.org/contact/area6.html](http://MiamiVRofficeswww.rehabworks.org/contact/area6.html) for additional information.

Miami-Dade County job fairs:

[Miami-Dade County - www.miamidade.gov/global/news-item.page?Mduid_news=news1644938130045677](http://www.miamidade.gov/global/news-item.page?Mduid_news=news1644938130045677)

FIU Career and Talent Development page

Career Fair – Career and Talent Development Florida International University (fiu.edu) - career.fiu.edu/resources/career-fair/

MDC Events:

Miami-Dade College -

calendar.mdc.edu/event/job_fair_your_career_starts_here

I wish that there was more time to talk to the Director. She was very kind and knowledgeable. She sent me to the exhibitor area, but no one was at the booth.

We apologize for the VR exhibit booth being unmanned at the time you stopped by. We appreciate the kind words about our VR Interim Director. She is extremely knowledgeable about assisting individuals with disabilities and welcomes open communication. She can be contacted at VRDirector@vr.fldoe.org.





The 26th Annual Family Café Report Card 2024

Attendees of The 26th 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 **E** = Poor

The table below displays the average grades for 2019 and 2021-2024. The subsequent table displays the average grades for 2020, which included different prompts due to the virtual nature of the event.

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2019
I would give the Annual Family Café location a . . .	A	A	A	A	A
I would rate the hotel's accessibility a . . .	A	A	A	A	A
I would give the organization of The Annual Family Café a . . .	A	A	A	A	A
I would rate the choices for breakout sessions and their ability to meet the needs of different interests a . . .	A	A	A-	A-	A
Overall, I would give The Annual Family Café a . . .	A	A	A-	A	A

The 22 nd Annual Family Café Virtual Event	2020
I would give the overall quality of the virtual event a . . .	B
I would rate the accessibility of the virtual event a . . .	A
I would give the organization of The Annual Family Café a . . .	A
I would rate the choices for breakout sessions and their ability to meet the needs of different interests a . . .	B
Overall, I would give The 22 nd Annual Family Café a . . .	A

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

1. As a result of attending The 26th Annual Family Café, I'm 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 use less of . . .
5. I am interested in finding out more about . . .
6. For future Annual Family Café events, I would like to suggest. . .

Here is a sample of their responses:

As a result of attending The 26th Annual Family Café, I'm able/will be able to . . .

- Help my children develop coping strategies to deal with the loss of their father, assist my children with securing employment, and help my children cope with their invisible disabilities
- Access a wide range of services to share with clients.
- Access assistance for post high school employment and vocational rehab.
- Access my ABLE account, get access to communication device for our son.
- Access resources like CDC+ and a wheelchair accessible van.
- Advocate better for my daughter. Show a greater understanding for my daughter's differences.
- Advocate better for my kids and family. Able to help friends, family, and my community members find resources that can help them.
- Advocate for my son in the school setting i.e. IEP. assist my son with transitioning from middle school to high school and then adulthood.
- Apply for guardian advocacy status
- Appreciate people with special needs more.
- Attend more accessible outdoor activities.
- Be a better caregiver.
- Be a better dad and partner to my wife.
- Be aware of services available for my child's diagnosis.
- Become a guardian advocate.
- Better assist my kids with their sensory needs
- Better support for my family. Deepen connections with people I met online then at The Family Cafe.
- Better support military families with children with disabilities.
- Better support my Spanish speaking families
- Communicate better, be a better dad and financially plan for the future.
- Complete Guardian Advocacy for my daughter
- Connect more with state agencies.
- Connect with an unlimited resource to help me navigate the needs of my children. It is so refreshing to see/touch and learn what resources are actually out there for our families.

- Connect with other families and share valuable resources and agencies that can help me out with transitions and work.
- Connect with other families, which is the best part!
- Deal with stress better.
- Explore getting my daughter set up with an ABLE account.
- File taxes, apply for a service dog, manage getting a new wheelchair.
- Finally understand Social Security.
- Find more resources for my daughter and the families with Spina Bifida we serve.
- Find out accurate information from government agencies (VR, Social Security).
- Get a trust fund for my kids. I spoke to an expert, and I will do one next month.
- Get help with SSI
- Get started on the guardianship process for my daughter.
- Go home with more information about what help is available.
- Have a place where my family and my child were welcomed as they are without judgement. To have a hotel filled with families like ours gave us a safe bubble for the few days we were there.
- Have more of an understanding of the large community of people with disabilities.
- Have my self-esteem back!
- Help my children and others by creating a family run organization.
- Help with IEP
- I am now able to understand how SSI, SSDI, and survivors' benefits.
- I connected to other parents! Love that part! I am there for community!
- I was able to get more information about the Step up for Students scholarship.
- I was able to get the help I needed, and questions answered with CDC+ program. Very helpful. I learned about ABLE Accounts and was able to get together with people dealing with the same kind of issues.
- Learn a lot about state resources I never knew existed.
- Learn about APD and CDC+.
- Learn about SSI which I need for my young adult son. The mental health session was also very interesting.
- Make new friends with other families that share the same struggles as me.
- More realistically determine whether CDC+ should be considered; 2) re-evaluate our special needs trust and guardian advocate status; 3) re-imagine creative ways to do 'exercise'--physical movement for wellness/fitness.
- Navigate APD more easily.
- Network better with families in the same boat. Access more state and federal programs.
- Options for college.
- Plan for my retirement and my son's financial future
- Share lots of new information with families. It has renewed my ability to help IDD.
- Speak up for myself and advocate.
- Take better care of myself and have more joy.
- Take care of my loved one with more confidence
- Understand better about estate planning, guardian advocacy and SNT.
- Understand legal aspects to advocate for my loved one with disabilities.
- Understand the SSI process more, have contact for scholarship, get signed up for the waiver

- Well, I've been coming to the Family Cafe for about 20 years or so every time I come it gets better and better much more organized much more things to do and it was well planned out this year

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

- A place for my adult autistic son to mingle with other people.
- ABLE Accounts and Special Needs Trusts.
- Access to agencies to have questions answered.
- Access to legal professionals.
- Advocacy sessions for family members with disabilities.
- All of it. So thankful!
- All of the books.
- All the booths they had in the expo hall.
- All the booths with so many options and people to explain all the different options I have.
- All the information and good times the kids had.
- APD & Exhibit Hall.
- APD, CDC+, SSI, Transition.
- Asking questions and forming relationships with other families
- Attending the FROM pre-con event
- Being able to speak one on one with certain vendors at the exhibit hall
- Being graced with a scholarship for the room. Made my wife and I feel treated to something we can't afford in life right now.
- Being in a different setting with like-minded people and being able to relax and enjoy the offerings.
- Breakout sessions and information.
- CDC+ session and Guardianship session.
- Club Café. These guys were terrific!
- Comradery and meeting other families
- Developing a deeper appreciation for people with disabilities as entrepreneurs and that it is possible.
- Disability lawyers, advocates, VR, Goodwill.
- Disability Rights Florida-this group is fantastic and much needed.
- Dr. Loyd's talk, Sensory Farm, Technology Fairs
- EVERYTHING and keeping this conference incredibly family friendly, it is so hard for families with children who have complex medical needs to get out of the house and come learn, and Family Cafe 110% gives families this ability and opportunity. Our family has been thankful to say the least.
- Everything being located in the hotel and ease of access. Friendliness and help of staff, so many topics covered for many different needs.
- Executive function session and the financial literacy session.
- Exhibit gallery and keynote speakers, because I found out information I wasn't aware of before.
- FASD and mental health sessions.
- Finding out about starting an ABLE account for my kids and SSI benefits for my son when he turns 18

- Found a tracking device, got contact info on Hope Florida, learned some techniques on behaviors. Lots of new stuff this year.
- Getting clarification on new programs and how they affect our care/family.
- Getting the contacts I needed as I was sitting on the phone on hold for hours getting nowhere.
- Guardianship information, CDC+ and vendors.
- Guardianship, SSI, and life after high school
- Having all the service providers and vendors in one place.
- Having contact info/emails for the presenters to be able to follow up with them.
- Having state and state-assigned contractors/bureaus available in the exhibit hall. The early childhood and sensory rooms were awesome.
- Hotel financial assistance, free scooter rental, various companies all in one place.
- Information from breakout sessions.
- Information in the exhibit hall
- Information on all state programs.
- Learning about how to raise capable kids.
- Learning about others like me.
- Learning about the difference between guardian and advocate
- Legal workshops.
- Listening to and interacting with agency heads, getting clarification and answers to our concerns.
- Many things but I was fascinated to meet other families like mine.
- Meeting and talking to others with similar challenges and opportunities.
- Meeting with direct contacts from agencies like Social Security and KidCare.
- Military, APD, Social Security,
- Mom 2 Moms session, emotions, stress breakouts. Loved the Expo.
- Networking and learning about available resources.
- People who have done things before me helping me understand the complicated systems.
- Phone app for family care
- Seeing everyone smile and talking about advocacy.
- Sessions for young adults transitioning.
- Sessions on SNTs.
- So much learning. We love the booths and all the resources we as parents were able to get for our kids.
- Staff were nice and willing to help.
- Supported decision making and safe schools
- This is my first year attending the conference, and received so much information and resources that I didn't even know existed. I was able to get information to programs that my kids can benefit from.
- Understanding guardianship, guardian advocate, assisted decision making, and power of attorney.
- Understanding the mental health system in Florida
- Women's Summit, developing friendships, learning from others and not feeling isolated.

I thought we could have had more of . . .

- A color-coded map for the different sessions
- A hotel that doesn't have carpeting. It's hard to push a wheelchair there.
- A microwave in our room.
- A way to connect with other parents. Parent or caregiver driven speakers for the event as a whole.
- Ability to have info from sessions we couldn't attend. Also- extend it a day to have longer sessions. Everyone was rushing to fit Info into one hour
- Accessibility to view recordings or slides of sessions we were not able to attend.
- Accessible parking, it was far when you are pushing a wheelchair and is raining.
- Activities for kids to be occupied while parents go to sessions.
- Add food trucks.
- ADHD information.
- Adult sensory room.
- Affordable food choices, but we do appreciate the 20% off.
- Affordable food choices, more collaborative/round table sessions.
- ALS and dementia workshops.
- Areas with tables and seating in the common areas so we could collect our thoughts, make notes, etc. or a room dedicated to relaxing and collecting ourselves. Better directions for where to go
- Book reading and seating areas. My autistic twins loved listening to the book readers.
- Breakout sessions regarding employment opportunities for individuals with IDD
- Breakout sessions on re-entering the job market.
- Breakouts on social skills, life skills, executive function and transferrable work skills.
- Breakouts/specialized on disorders.
- Childcare.
- Class spread out was hard to attend without cutting into each other.
- Definitely need more parent stories! While parents may not have a PhD or "credentials" It is their journey that I want to hear! It is there a message, their advice that I want to hear! Different locations in Florida so all families can attend.
- Duplicate breakout sessions. I missed some due to having too many of interest.
- EDS, POTS, a broader array of conditions instead of just autism.
- Everything was great to me. This is my first time attending. I appreciate all the hard work put on this weekend.
- Extended Q&A with APD and larger room.
- Food choices. Food options in the hotel are very limited and there were long lines that many disabled adults were having difficulty with waiting.
- For first timers, having breakout session times and information at the entrance of exhibit hall.
- General question and answer sessions for parents to share what they know.
- Handicap Parking. The garage was restricted to paying guests
- Homeschool/transitions from 18-21 and beyond.
- I wish that organizations, such as Social Security for example, would have some way to schedule some time for one-on-one meetings to answer specific questions.
- Independent living.
- Information on Medicaid and Medicaid accessibility.
- Maps printed and put in the bags that people get so they know where to go

- Men's Summit during the Women's Summit.
- Mental health resources, behavioral resources.
- More individuals with disabilities discussing successful paths for employment, community living, etc. and more family or parent stories
- More information on PTSD in children, childhood sexual trauma, resources.
- More rooms blocked out for the Café at the Hyatt.
- More sessions on who, when, and how to best engage the varying departments that impact people with disabilities
- Organized activities for various ages (not at the same scheduled times as breakout sessions), an adult sensory room.
- Parent Q & A
- Parking and elevator needs improvement.
- Parking for people staying off site.
- Photo areas, the kids love when the characters come out it really makes their day!!!!
- Presence from Medicaid.
- Quiet places for those sensitive to loud noises, signs indicating session locations.
- Rare Disease Information & Discussions
- Record more sessions. We missed a lot.
- Repeated sessions.
- Roundtable get togethers of families of specific age groups or needs.
- Roundtables about autism or mental health.
- Sessions on APD.
- Sessions on self-advocacy.
- Social events
- Some type of breakouts/meet and greet for families by geographic area/county
- Spanish events or including Spanish speakers more.
- Specialized volunteers trained in de-escalating behaviors.
- Strategies for dealing with sensory processing and executive functioning disorders.
- Time during sessions for Q&A.
- Time to fit in more sessions
- Variety of times for breakout sessions.
- Volunteers to help assist others.

I thought we could use less of . . .

- Adult sessions. Almost everything was for children.
- Attorney presentations
- Avon-like (MLM) vendors.
- BALLOONS! Individuals with Spina Bifida and medical professionals are prone to latex allergies!
- Breakout sections on the second level when the hotel offers limited elevators. We were often late to a session only because we were waiting for an elevator.
- Cancelled sessions.
- Crowded sessions with standing room only
- Distance between locations.
- Exhibits of the same thing.

- Guardianship sessions. There were multiple ones going on at the same time.
- I thought we could use less breakout sessions and more interactive group sessions to enhance engagement and collaboration among participants
- I-Drive traffic is horrible. We liked being at the Rosen Shingle Creek.
- Less crowds. It was hard getting in and out of places.
- Less selection of sessions in each time block. There are too many sessions that I would have tried to go to, but they were at the same time.
- Lines.
- Loud music at the dance.
- Noise in the foyer area. My daughter has sensory issues and I saw several other kids cringing from pain from the loudness of the music.
- Nothing. Everything was very interesting and important for new families in this journey.
- Nothing... I really felt it was well rounded and offered a lot of different options.
- Presenters reading from slides
- Sessions at the same time.
- Sessions for young children. I'm past that stage as a self-advocate.
- The chaos when checking in was a struggle for many people. It was overstimulating. It seemed like it was smoother as time went on though.
- Time for keynote speakers limit them to 30 mins to 45 mins
- Transition time between sessions.
- Waiting for elevators and parking garage.
- Walking

I am interested in finding out more about . . .

- A roadmap for parents when dealing with govt agencies. What to expect, what do I need, etc.
- A Therapy dog.
- ABLE accounts.
- Activities and services for adults.
- Activities, volunteer opportunities for young adult
- Adaptive bikes and how to obtain one.
- Adaptive daily living technology and items for adults with physical disabilities to live in their homes and apartments more independently.
- Adult living options for IDD adults who need constant support with behavior too.
- APD and their new criteria.
- APD needed more sessions and so did Disability Rights. Also CMS needs to make a session explaining all their benefits
- Autism and resources for ADHD.
- Autism community-based events, outings, lessons for various interests.
- availability of dentists that will work on disabled and behavioral therapists
- Becoming a paid caregiver.
- Becoming an advocate.
- Being independent.
- Beyond high school for people with disabilities

- CDC+ Program and how survivors' benefits can be used without messing up other resources.
- CHARGE Syndrome
- CILs would have been nice to see
- Different areas of employment and travel opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Disabilities concurring with mental health issues and how it affects individuals.
- Dyslexia
- Everything!
- Family caregiving for medical children that do not have a ID diagnosis.
- Florida colleges and universities that have programs for individuals with disabilities.
- Foster care information.
- Funding sources, housing, etc.
- Getting additional assistance in my county.
- Group homes.
- How do I protect my adult children while they use the internet? How to be in Partners in Policymaking.
- How to be on the Family Care Council.
- How to do more for siblings.
- How to get a business for special needs. How to get a sib shop in my community.
- How to get the word out about Family Café.
- How to start an independent living community in my town.
- How to volunteer.
- How visual impairments affect child development.
- How we can raise the \$2000 income limit for Medicaid.
- Human trafficking in persons with mental health conditions.
- Independent living.
- Information on housing, adult waivers, aging caregivers.
- Laws and pending budget issues/challenges we can advocate for.
- Learning how to be the support coordinator for my adult child
- Living options beyond group homes.
- Medicaid waiver renewal process.
- Medicare supplements and Medicare advantage.
- Mental health.
- Military dependents transitioning to adult and losing healthcare at age 21
- More information on SSI and SSDI
- More topics in Spanish.
- Navigating benefits when approved. Explanation of what abbreviations mean within the agencies. Families are confused and lost in the process.
- Organizing and funding for community-based groups and supports.
- Relationship building.
- Resources for therapy for adults with disabilities.
- Resources available in my specific area.
- Respite services.
- Sensory activities I can do at home.
- Service dogs.
- Services available for older adults.
- Services for children who don't qualify for Medicaid.
- Social security.

- Special needs trust funding, taxes, legal issues.
- Support for disabled moms.
- Supported decision making.
- Technology and services for people with disabilities.
- The economics of raising a child with autism.
- The future of disabilities equality.
- Therapy dogs.
- Topics for parents/sibs of people with disabilities, or maybe an adult sib shop.
- Visual impairments and how they affect the development of children.
- Volunteer opportunities

For future Annual Family Café events, I would like to suggest. . .

- Better overflow parking.
- More space/seats in breakout rooms for sure
- Better projectors and AV help in rooms
- captions to be utilized in ALL presentations
- Include a voter registration booth to offer the opportunity for attendees to register to vote.
- A better, more cohesive and less chaotic registration process
- A first timer's guide.
- A hotel that can accommodate everyone coming to the conference.
- A new location.
- A place that can fit parking for all their attendees.
- A session on homeschooling and how to obtain diplomas and higher education after homeschooling.
- Address the parking limitations.
- Affordable meal options.
- Allowing more to come and better financial assistance programs
- Area where parents can leave a child for an hour so they can go to sessions.
- Autism and anxiety disorders information
- Better advertising. So many families have never heard about this event.
- Better directional signs in the halls.
- Better labeling of registration lines.
- Break out areas or activities/Meet and greets for parents by county. Very hard to connect with other parents
- Can it please have more days with fewer breakouts each day so that you can attend more of them. Many of the concurrent sessions overlap with each other and you can't attend everything you would like.
- Changing venue. It's becoming so hard to get to that part of Orlando and find parking.
- Childcare.
- Clowns.
- Cooking sessions.
- Creating suggested schedules for parents that are overwhelmed.
- Drum circle in Club Café, more gluten free options.
- Everything was awesome.

- Everything was excellent.
- Everything was great.
- Everything was perfect.
- Executive function breakout/social skills and life skills.
- Figure out which presentations are expected to have a large audience and put them in larger rooms.
- Florida Kid Care sessions and legal presentations. Social security benefits.
- Food stipends, sensory room with swings. Maybe coffee stations.
- Food trucks.
- Free breakfast.
- Have more interactive sessions, especially in Youth track.
- Have the name of the session in front of the room where it takes place.
- Having additional golf carts to transport from parking garage and additional overflow lots.
- Having more breakout rooms and learning experiences.
- Having more disabled adults be the volunteers.
- How to integrate our SSI, DCF, and Med waiver benefits.
- I would get some more face painters and artists!
- I would like to hear about other parent experiences.
- I would like to suggest that there be dedicated quiet zones or sensory-friendly spaces for individuals who need them
- In the program, list exhibitor booth numbers.
- Invite some state colleges to come to talk about how people with disabilities can navigate the college entry level.
- Karaoke and Dance Party, Pool Party, Free food for people that can't afford it.
- Keep doing amazing things. You rock!
- Keeping the app and the program. Great resources.
- Large print and braille
- Lowering lights for the dance.
- Maybe a suggested sessions section on the app for newcomers. I was overwhelmed with too many options. (Family Café 101?)
- More adult centered advocacy.
- More bilingual sessions, less time in meetings, more hands-on activities for kids.
- More complimentary scooters.
- More events like cooking, Zumba, teaching daily living skills
- More meetings for older disabled persons.
- More volunteers to assist with check-in and registration.
- More volunteers to assist.
- Need larger rooms for sessions regarding social security and APD.
- Not scheduling similar sessions all at the same time.
- Notes from workshops (post online so parents can get what they missed).
- Nothing, it was perfect. It was amazing to individual parents. We had lots of one-on-one and I love it so much. I cried with happiness.
- Nothing... the event was a HIT! It brought joy to my heart to see such a well-organized event that catered to everyone's abilities.
- Please consider recording sessions or somehow providing handouts/PowerPoints available.

- Recording sessions and all sessions printing or providing attendees with presentation materials.
- Regional spotlights on services
- Separate sales vendors from information vendors.
- Some kind of meet and greet for caregivers to connect with and help one another on this hard journey.
- Space designated for govt agencies outside of the exhibit hall to ask questions.
- Thank you for continuing to do this year after year. We, the parents, truly THANK YOU!
- The whole convention was amazing!!
- Tracks for different diagnosis and age groups.
- You guys do a great job just keep it coming. Thank you.





See you soon!!!

Join the momentum!

Take part in The Family Café's newest program,
the Family-Run Organization Movement (FROM)!

The Mission of FROM is to engage, support, empower and advocate for family, youth and peer-run organizations.

FROM will provide a wide range of supports and services, including leadership training, governance enhancement, program support, monthly collaborative forums, a program newsletter, and other resources to help organizations attain new levels of participation in the system of care.

Local family-run organizations are a critical part of the service delivery system, bringing families and youth together, connecting them with information, resources, and each other. FROM is here to help them thrive!

To join and get more information please see the FROM link at www.familycafe.net or call 850-224-4670

FROM
Family Run Organization Movement
"Moving families forward. From our family to yours."



SEE YOU NEXT YEAR!

AT THE 27TH ANNUAL
FAMILY CAFE



JUNE 13-15, 2025
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The Family Café



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713 East Park Avenue • Tallahassee, FL 32301 • familycafe.net