



of Northeast Louisiana, Inc.
5200 Northeast Road
Monroe, LA 71203

info@fhfnela.org www.fhfnela.org

Newsletter

January 2017 – July 2017



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Thelma Scott, OCDD
Keirston Norman, EarlySteps
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Please like and share our facebook, twitter and pinterest page! We are looking forward to sharing important information, upcoming event, and future trainings.



Hidden Logo Contest

For those of you who are receiving your first newsletter or for those who have forgotten about the contest, here are the rules. Hidden somewhere within the pages is the Families Helping Families house logo. All you have to do is find the little house and call or send an email telling us where you found the logo. The one in the masthead at the top of this page is NOT IT!! Two (2) weeks after we mail the newsletter, we'll draw from all the entries. The winner will receive a WalMart gift card and will be acknowledged in the next publication. So good luck and good reading!

The winner of the hidden logo was Karla Brantley

1st Annual Families Helping Families -Touch a Truck-Trick or Treat Event

Dear Friends,

The dust has finally settled from our 1st Annual Touch a Truck-Trick or Treat Event and what an amazing event it was! This idea came to fruition because of the yearly threats of state budget cuts. The board and staff at FHF decided we need an event that would generate funding that would allow us to continue to serve the families who reach out to us for help each day. Under no circumstances do we ever want to not be here when a family of a child with a disability needs assistance.

FHF is staffed by parents of children with disabilities. We understand the challenges that arise in carrying for a child with a disability and have devoted our lives to supporting other families who are facing similar challenges. Each year, we serve more than 6,000 families- offering support, education, training, information, referral, and when necessary financial assistance. Our crisis fund pays for gas for out of town medical appointments, medical equipment and supplies, diapers, food, formula, and other expenses of our families during a time of financial crisis.

Touch a Truck offered the opportunity to bring awareness to the issues that 1 in 10 families in Northeast Louisiana face, as well as to provide funding for our programs and crisis fund. It more importantly gave children with and without disabilities the opportunity to "play together". Awareness and community inclusion are the core principals of the work we do.

We are thrilled to report that more than 3,000 people attended Touch a Truck and more than 75 vehicles were present at this event.

The safe atmosphere and friendly volunteers are what made this event possible. We would like to that each of you gave so much of your time passing out candy, interacting with the families attending, and picking up child after child and placing them behind the wheel or allowing them to honk a horn, or sound a siren, Your willingness to participate in this event is truly what made this possible. We could not have had the success we had without YOU!

Thank you for donating your equipment, your staff, your time, and your money to help us make this event everything it was. We are blessed to have you in our community. You have all become a cherished member of the FHF family.

Vehicle Participants

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>The Radio People Boom Box
 American Crane
 American Medical Response
 Barak Shrine Temple
 Barnhart Crane & Rigging
 Bears Towing & Recovery
 Ben Allen
 BlueLine Rental
 Brookshire's
 Century Ready -Mix
 Classic Cars
 Delhi Fire Dept.
 Donnie Plunk's Towing & Recovery
 Entergy
 Exco
 Franklin Parish Sheriff's Dept.
 Goldman Equipment
 Gorilla Axle
 House of Cycles
 Kepper Equipment</p> | <p>Kilbourne Fire Dept.
 LA State Police Troop
 Mike Mayfield
 Monroe City Police Dept.
 Monroe Fire Dept.
 Monroe Tranist
 Ouachita Parish Fire Department
 Ouachita parish Sheriff's Office
 Plunk's Wrecker Service
 Polaris RZR
 Roe City Riders MC Group
 Sani Can
 Skyjacker
 Southeastern Freight Lines
 West Monroe Fire Dept.
 West Monroe Police
 West Monroe Skate town
 Ben Guidry
 Richland Parish Sheriff's office</p> |
|---|--|

Sponsors

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>Skyjacker
 Blueline Rental
 Booth wealth Management
 Dr.KC & Hillary Sirmon in Memory of Benjamin Sirmon
 Bears Towing
 Dr.Blanchard
 Southeastern Freight Lines
 Fast Service</p> | <p>Henry Bateman
 Nakika Harris
 Origin Bank
 SciTec
 Macaroni Kid
 Restorative Home Health
 Dr. Mickey
 The Radio People</p> |
|---|---|



In Honor of Stephen P. Blanchard, Jr.

The 2nd Annual Touch a Truck event will be October 28, 2017. We hope you will join us again.

God Bless,

Stacey Guidry
 Executive Director

Attention Everyone on the NOW Waiting List



If you or your loved one is currently on the New Opportunities Waiver (NOW) waiting list, officially known as the Request for Services Registry (RFSR) listen up. By now you should have received a letter from Mark Thomas, OCDD Assistant Secretary with the State of Louisiana informing you about a new screening project.

Beginning October 10, 2016 through May 30, 2017 each Human Service Authority or District or their representatives will be contacting everyone on the NOW waiting list to complete a new screening calling the Screening for Urgency of Need (SUN). This screening process will take the place of your yearly validation. In order to remain on the waiting list, you must complete this screening. The screening may take 1 to 2 hours, depending on the needs.

If you are on the waiting list and have NOT received this letter, it's very important you contact your local Human Service Authority or District to make sure you are in fact on the NOW waiting list and they have your correct mailing address. If you have moved since you were initially put on the waiting list and never updated your information, you need to do this immediately.

Why the new screening?

It's no secret the NOW waiting list has over 10,000 people waiting for services. Currently, everyone approved for the NOW waiver waited their turn on the waiting list. Once their name came up, they were sent an offer letter for the NOW waiver. Because of our state's constant budget issues, the list has continued to grow. Even when the legislature approves new slots, it's so seldom and the supply simply cannot keep up with the demand.

What the state knows is everyone on the list has a different level of needs. Many have critical needs that need to be met immediately or it may be life threatening. Others have significant needs, but not considered life threatening. Then we have others on the list with no substantial needs at this time, but anticipate as their child grows up their needs will be greater. According to Mark Thomas, during this screening process the representatives will be asking questions about:

1. The types of existing formal and informal supports/services you and/or your family currently receive;
2. Types of supports/services you and your family need but do not currently receive; and
3. The urgency of the support needs identified.

After this information is gathered it will be used to inform legislative requests specific to funding for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Honesty is the key

As parents many of us love to brag about the wonderful things our children and adults with disabilities have accomplished. These are the things that make us proud to be their parents. However, we must be painfully honest when speaking to the representatives. It's okay to share your successes, but keep them in a good frame of reference. You need to be completely upfront about your needs and how it will improve the quality of life for everyone involved. Think about the questions carefully and how they might apply to a typical person not needing supports. Remember, at some point this urgency might determine how quickly you get services.

For additional information you may call JoAnn Payne with OCDD at 1-866-517-7687 or email ocddsystemtransformation@la.gov.

What are ABLE Accounts?

ABLE Accounts: 10 Things You Should Know

1. What is an ABLE account?

ABLE Accounts, which are tax-advantaged savings accounts for individuals with disabilities and their families, will be created as a result of the passage of the Stephen Beck Jr., Achieving a Better Life Experience Act of 2014 or better known as the ABLE Act. The beneficiary of the account is the account owner, and income earned by the accounts will not be taxed. Contributions to the account made by any person (the account beneficiary, family and friends) will be made using post-taxed dollars and will not be tax deductible, although some states may allow for state income tax deductions for contribution made to an ABLE account.

2. Why the need for ABLE accounts?

Millions of individuals with disabilities and their families depend on a wide variety of public benefits for income, health care and food and housing assistance. Eligibility for these public benefits (SSI, SNAP, Medicaid) require meeting a means or resource test that limits eligibility to individuals to report more than \$2,000 in cash savings, retirement funds and other items of significant value. To remain eligible for these public benefits, an individual must remain poor. For the first time in public policy, the ABLE Act recognizes the extra and significant costs of living with a disability. These include costs, related to raising a child with significant disabilities or a working age adult with disabilities, for accessible housing and transportation, personal assistance services, assistive technology and health care not covered by insurance, Medicaid or Medicare.

For the first time, eligible individuals and their families will be allowed to establish ABLE savings accounts that will not affect their eligibility for SSI, Medicaid and other public benefits. The legislation explains further that an ABLE account will, with private savings, "secure funding for disability-related expenses on behalf of designated beneficiaries with disabilities that will supplement, but not supplant, benefits provided through private insurance, Medicaid, SSI, the beneficiary's employment and other sources."

3. Am I eligible for an ABLE account?

The ABLE Act limits eligibility to individuals with significant disabilities with an age of onset of disability before turning 26 years of age. If you meet this age criteria and are also receiving benefits already under SSI and/or SSDI, you are automatically eligible to establish an ABLE account. If you are not a recipient of SSI and/or SSDI, but still meet the age of onset disability requirement, you could still be eligible to open an ABLE account if you meet Social Security's definition and criteria regarding significant functional limitations and receive a letter of certification from a licensed physician. You need not be under the age of 26 to be eligible for an ABLE account. You could be over the age of 26, but must have had an age of onset before the individual's 26 birthday.

4. Are there limits to how much money can be put in an ABLE account?

The total annual contributions by all participating individuals, including family and friends, for a single tax year is \$14,000. The amount may be adjusted periodically to account for inflation. Under current tax law, \$14,000 is the maximum amount that individuals can make as a gift to someone else and not report the gift to the IRS (gift tax exclusion). The total limit over time that could be made to an ABLE account will be subject to the individual state and their limit for education-related 529 savings accounts. Many states have set this limit at more than \$300,000 per plan. However, for individuals with disabilities who are recipients of SSI, the ABLE Act sets some further limitations. The first \$100,000 in ABLE accounts would be exempted from the SSI \$2,000 individual resource limit. If and when an ABLE account exceeds \$100,000, the beneficiary's SSI cash benefit would be suspended until such time as the account falls back below \$100,000. It is important to note that while the beneficiary's eligibility for the SSI cash benefit is suspended, this has no effect on their ability to receive or be eligible to receive medical assistance

through Medicaid.

Additionally, upon the death of the beneficiary the state in which the beneficiary lived may file a claim to all or a portion of the funds in the account equal to the amount in which the state spent on the beneficiary through their state Medicaid program. This is commonly known as the "Medicaid Pay-Back" provision and the claim could recoup Medicaid related expenses from the time the account was open.

5. Which expenses are allowed by ABLE accounts?

A "qualified disability expense" means any expense related to the designated beneficiary as a result of living a life with disabilities. These may include education, housing, transportation, employment training and support, assistive technology, personal support services, health care expenses, financial management and administrative services and other expenses which help improve health, independence, and/or quality of life.

6. Can I have more than one ABLE account?

No. The ABLE Act limits the opportunity to one ABLE account per eligible individual.

7. Do I have to wait for my state to establish a program before opening an account?

No. While the original law passed in 2014 did stipulate that an individual had to open an account in their state of residency, this provision was eliminated by Congress in 2015. This means that regardless of where you might live and whether or not your state has decided to establish an ABLE program, you are free to enroll in any state's program provided that the program is accepting out of state residents.

To determine which state ABLE programs are accepting out of state programs, please refer to the individual state pages. Examples of state ABLE programs accepting enrollment nationwide include: Ohio, Nebraska, and Tennessee. An example of a state ABLE program only accepting in-state residents would include the Florida ABLE United program.

8. Will states offer options to invest the savings contributed to an ABLE account?

Like state 529 college savings plans, states are likely to offer qualified individuals and families multiple options to establish ABLE accounts with varied investment strategies. Each individual and family will need to project possible future needs and costs over time, and to assess their risk tolerance for possible future investment strategies to grow their savings. Account contributors or designated beneficiaries are limited, by the ABLE Act, to change the way their money is invested in the account up to two times per year.

9. How is an ABLE account different than a special needs or pooled trust?

An ABLE Account will provide more choice and control for the beneficiary and family. Cost of establishing an account will likely be considerably less than either a Special Needs Trust (SNT) or Pooled Income Trust. With an ABLE account, account owners will have the ability to control their funds and, if circumstances change, still have other options available to them. Determining which option is the most appropriate will depend upon individual circumstances. For many families, the ABLE account will be a significant and viable option in addition to, rather than instead of, a Trust program. For more information, the webinar on ABLE Accounts, Trusts, Financial and Benefits Planning is archived on our website along with its slides and transcript.

10. How Will I know Which State ABLE Program is Right for Me?

By the Summer of 2016, we expect that several states will have opened ABLE programs and be inviting eligible individuals nationwide to open an ABLE account regardless of their state of residence. When comparing State ABLE programs you may want to consider the following questions in order to find a program that best meets your needs:

Opening an Account

- What proof will the ABLE program require for you to document in order to open an account or show that your disbursements are qualified expenses?
- Is there a minimum contribution to open an ABLE account?
- Is there a fee to open an account and, if so, how much is that fee?

Maintaining the Account and Fees

- Is there a required minimum contribution to your account? If so, what is the amount?
- Are the fees front end loaded or are they reduced if you leave your funds invested for several years?
- Are there restrictions on how often you can withdraw funds from your account?

Investment Opportunities

- What are the investment options the state ABLE program offers?
- Are the options likely to meet your needs for limiting risk with the growth of your contributed dollars to the ABLE account?
- Does the program offer any unique or value added program elements to help you save, contribute to your account, grow the account, and manage your invested dollars?
- Does the state program offer any unique or value added program elements (such as a match or rewards program, financial literacy info or program for beneficiaries) to help you save, contribute to your account, grow the account, and manage your invested dollars? If so, what is it?

Unique to Your State

- Does your state have a program and, if so, do they offer a state income tax for contributions to their account?
- Is there a "debit card/purchasing card" available with the program? Are there added costs to this?

2016 marks the first year in which ABLE accounts will be available to qualified beneficiaries. Now that you have some basic understanding of ABLE, including who is eligible to open an account, limits on contributions, and allowable purposes to use ABLE account funds, you may be asking yourself how you can prepare for enrollment in an ABLE program. By the Summer of 2016, we expect that several states will have opened ABLE programs and be inviting eligible individuals nationwide to open an ABLE account regardless of their state of residence. The video "Becoming ABLE Ready" details suggestions on how a potential beneficiary and/or their family could begin to prepare to open an account.

When comparing State ABLE programs consider the following questions in order to find a program that best meets your needs:

Opening an Account

- What proof will the ABLE program require for you to document in order to open an account or show that your disbursements are qualified expenses?
- Is there a minimum contribution to open an ABLE account?
- Is there a fee to open an account and, if so, how much is that fee?

Maintaining the Account and Fees

- Is there a required minimum contribution to your account? If so, what is the amount?
- Do you have a clear understanding of the fees associated with management of the fund?
- Are the fees front end loaded or are they reduced if you leave your funds invested for several years?
- Are there restrictions on how often you can withdraw funds from your account?

Investment Opportunities

- What are the investment options the state ABLE program offers?
- Are the options likely to meet your needs for limiting risk with the growth of your contributed dollars to the ABLE account?
- Are there options to help increase income from your invested dollars? What has been the history of the rate of return of the investment fund?

- What access will you have to learn about the current rate of return on funds invested? Could you access the information daily online?
- Are there investment options that have reduced fees if the funds are not touched for more than a year? If so, what are they?
- How will an account owner learn about the current rate of return on funds invested?
- Does the program offer any unique or value added program elements to help you save, contribute to your account, grow the account, and manage your invested dollars?
- Does the state program offer any unique or value added program elements (such as a match or rewards program, financial literacy info or program for beneficiaries) to help you save, contribute to your account, grow the account, and manage your invested dollars? If so, what is it?

Unique to Your State

- Does your state have a program and, if so, do they offer a state income tax for contributions to their account?
- Is there a "debit card/purchasing card" available with the program? Are there added costs to this?



earlySteps
Louisiana's early intervention system

If you know a child who has a problem walking, talking, hearing or seeing or who has a medical condition that could cause a delay in any of these areas, call EarlySteps 318.322.4788 locally or 1.877.322.4788 toll free.

EarlySteps is Louisiana's Early Intervention System providing services to families with infants and toddlers ages 0 to 36 months who might need the services that EarlySteps can provide. If your child or someone you know needs the services this program offers, please call immediately.

<p style="text-align: center;">What EarlySteps DOES provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assistive Technology Devices and Services <li style="padding-left: 40px;">Audiology <li style="padding-left: 40px;">Home Visits <li style="padding-left: 40px;">Nutrition Services Occupational, Physical and Speech Therapies <li style="padding-left: 40px;">Psychological Services <li style="padding-left: 40px;">Service Coordination <li style="padding-left: 40px;">Special Instructions <li style="padding-left: 40px;">Vision Services Family Support Referrals 	<p style="text-align: center;">What EarlySteps DOES NOT provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surgeries Medical Treatments Medical Equipment Routine medical care Medical Diagnosis Immunizations Childcare
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How do I make a referral?

Anyone may refer to EarlySteps by calling 318.322.4788 or 1.877.322.4788

Caldwell	East Carroll	Franklin	Jackson	Lincoln	Madison
Morehouse	Ouachita	Richland	Tensas	Union	West Carroll

ACT 303 FACT SHEET

Were you a student with a disability in high school and didn't earn a diploma?

During the Regular Legislative Session of 2016 a bill was passed that allows certain previous students with a disability that didn't earn a high school diploma the opportunity to now earn a high school diploma. Yes, you heard me correctly. Even if you are already out of school, certain students can now ask for reconsideration.

Act 303 is the new law that provides a small window of opportunity for students with disabilities to petition their local school board for reconsideration. You should act now if you qualify. The deadline to petition your local school board is December 31, 2017. Knowing that schools generally are closed during the holiday season, I wouldn't suggest waiting till the end of December 2017 to petition.

Who may petition their local school board?

- Any person who is no longer enrolled in a public school but was identified as a student with a disability with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP); and
- Failed to receive a high school diploma or was denied graduation solely for failing to meet the exit examination requirements.

What exactly does this mean?

- You must still meet all other graduation requirements:
 - Took and passed the required classes to earn a high school diploma; and
 - Earned all required Carnegie Units to earn a high school diploma; and
 - Meet all other high school graduation requirements other than the exit exam requirements.
- If you qualify, you should contact the Special Education Director in your school district to find out the name and address of the person in the school district to send your petition.
 - Mail in your official petition to that person before the deadline.
 - Deadline to petition is December 31, 2017.

What happens next?

- The school district will then need to determine eligibility by:
 - Establish procedures for determination; and
 - Review previous records to determine eligibility.
- The school district will then forward to the Louisiana Department of Education requests for diplomas by January 10, 2018.

This is huge for individuals that meet the eligibility criteria. Data shows individuals with high school diplomas earn more than those without one. High school diploma's also open up opportunities to higher education which was previously denied for many students without a high school diploma. Act NOW on Act 303!

For further assistance, please contact your local FHF Center:



Region 1 - 504.943.0343 Region 2 - 225.216.7474
Region 3 - 985.447.4461 Region 4 - 337.954.3458
Region 5 - 337.436.2570 Region 6 - 318.641.7373
Region 7 - 318.226.4541 Region 8 - 318.361.0487
Region 9 - 985.875.0511 Region 10- 504.888.9111



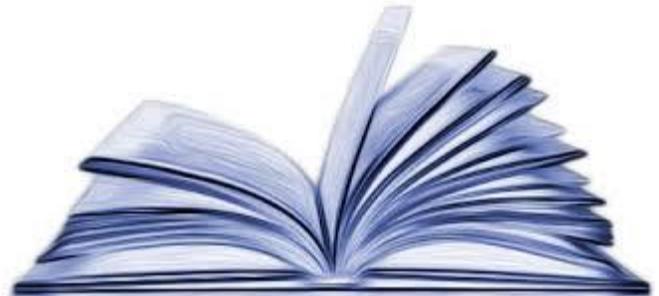
The Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council's grassroots advocacy networks, LaCAN (Louisiana Citizens for Action Now) and LaTEACH (Louisiana Together Educating All Children), merged on October 1, 2016 to become the brand new **LaCAN (Louisiana Council's Advocacy Network)**.

LaCAN will now keep you informed about opportunities to advocate for systems change in home and community-based services, employment, and education. The Council is also merging our LaCAN, LaTEACH and LaDDC News subscribers into one Constant Contact account email system. You should receive or may have already received an email from this new account letting you know that you have been added.

We encourage you to save info@laddc.org to your email account's address book or safe senders list to ensure you continue to receive all the latest advocacy news and alerts in your inbox. This transition will also allow you to manage your DD Council email subscriptions and update your contact information in one place. If you have any questions regarding this merger, please contact the Council office at 1-800-450-8108. Thank you for your continued involvement in the Council's grassroots advocacy efforts. Together we are making a difference!

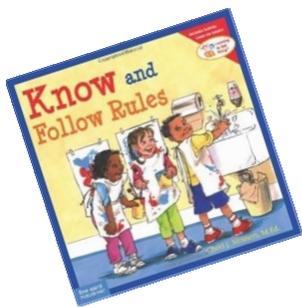
Help us spread the word and be sure to like the LaCAN page at www.facebook.com/lacanadvocates/ to continue seeing all the Council's advocacy news and alerts regarding home and community-based services, employment, and education.

Families Helping Families Lending Library

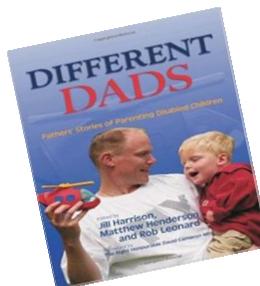


Families Helping Families has a lending library, books, dvds and more are here, free of charge for families and professionals to check out. You are welcome to come and browse our library during our office hours, Monday through Friday, 8 am to 4 pm.

Here are some books that are available in the Lending Library.



A child who can't follow rules is a child who's always in trouble. This book starts with simple reasons why we have rules: to help us stay safe, learn, be fair, and get along. Then it presents just four basic rules: "Listen," "Best Work," "Hands and Body to Myself," and "Please and Thank You." The focus throughout is on the positive sense of pride that comes with learning to follow rules. Includes questions and activities adults can use to reinforce the ideas and skills being taught.



Fathers of disabled children can feel overlooked when the focus of much parenting support is aimed at mothers. 'Different Dads' is a collection of personal testimonies written by fathers of children with a disability who reflect on their own experiences and offer advice to other fathers and families on the challenges of raising a child with a disability. The fathers featured represent a broad spectrum of experiences. Contributors are drawn from a wide range of cultures; some are single fathers, others are married adoptive fathers. What they all have in common are the challenges that face them and their families in raising a child with a disability.

Before you buy it - check to see if we have it!

Friday Focus Groups

Friday Focus Groups

Once a month, adults who are out of high school are invited to participate in an activity sponsored by Families Helping Families. During the winter months, indoor activities are planned. The group has made Christmas ornaments, attended the FHF Open House, played Bingo, viewed movies at FHF as well as gathered at the mall for lunch and a movie there. Bowling and going to Chuck E Cheese were also favorites. When the weather warms up a little, the gang flies kites, plays mini golf, goes to the local zoo, and in May boards a bus to attend the LaCAN Rally in Baton Rouge. Summertime brings "Come Paint with Us" and the annual Watermelon/Ice Cream event. The 2015 - 2016 year featured Chuck E Cheese, Watermelon and Ice Cream Social, bowling, a health fair at Kiroli Park, our first Fall Festival and our very first annual Family Fun Day at the Zoo.

This program is still unfunded and relies on friends and interested community partners making donations so that monthly events can continue. If you would like to financially support this group, please let us know.



Next Chapter Book Clubs

The Next Chapter Book Clubs are for adults with developmental disabilities regardless of their reading ability. Participants meet weekly for an hour at Joe Muggs Coffee Shop inside Books a Million and discuss a chapter of the book the group is currently reading. We currently have four groups that are meeting and we are supplying support to a group.

1st Annual Bath Bomb Fundraiser

Our 1st Annual Bath Bomb Fundraiser has been very successful! Our clients and staff made handcrafted organic bath bombs that were sold to benefit our Adult Opportunity programs. The clients had a wonderful time making them and loved that they were able to contribute to their programs. We are still selling them at this time and have currently raised over \$1,000.00! This money will go to buy books for our book clubs and to fund our Friday Focus events. Thank you to everyone who helped or purchased bath bombs. Your support has been amazing!



Thanks, "Santa!"

Ho! Ho! Ho! This year "Santa's" bag was filled with lots of books and toys for the girls and boys of FHF & CSHS. Thanks to Mayor Jamie Mayo and the Monroe City Employees for their generous donations of "books and bears." Because of their benevolence, many children in Region 8 will be able to continue to strive for academic excellence by improving their "Reading Scores."

Again, thank you Mayor Mayo and Monroe City Employees. Together, we are "Monroe Proud!"

By Evelyn Jackson
Parent Liaison CSHS Region 8



Families Helping Families of NELA has just launched our official App. It is free of charge and can be downloaded at the App store on Android or iOS devices. Download it today to keep up with us! Check back daily to see upcoming events and information as it becomes available. Use this QR Code to download now!



Help us go Green.

Receive your newsletter electronically.
Email your email address to info@fhfnela.org
Or call 318.361.0487



Save the Date

Friday, February 24, 2017
9:30 am - 12:00 pm

Delta Community College
7500 Millhaven Rd. Room 108
Monroe, LA 71203

RSVP to
Stacey Guidry
318-361-0487 or sguidry@fifmela.org



Louisiana Developmental
Disabilities Council



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