

QUARTER NEWSLETTER

HAPPY 2026

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Families Helping Families of Northeast Louisiana, Inc. is a family-directed resource center whose mission is to provide information, referrals, and peer to peer support to individuals with disabilities and their families.

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Funding Acknowledgements:



These agencies provide the core funding to support programs and services provided by the network of Families Helping Families resource centers across the state of Louisiana. These agencies also work hand-in-hand with FHF Centers to support various collaborative initiatives, as they too believe that families are a vital component in the array of services provided to individuals with disabilities.

Who We Are:

Families Helping Families is one of the lead resource centers serving individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in Northeast Louisiana. Eligible disabilities include physical, mental, emotional, behavioral, and/or learning disabilities.

Caring for individuals who have disabilities takes a wealth of support, knowledge, and information. The Families Helping Families Center is uniquely committed to empowering individuals who have a disability. Each staff member at Families Helping Families is personally connected to the disabled community.

Families Helping Families utilizes a parent-driven, coordinated network of services to assist families in achieving the ultimate goal of full inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

Families Helping Families has successfully assisted thousands of families in connecting them to services, understanding their rights and responsibilities which allow individuals to live, work, and play in our communities.

WHAT WE DO...

Information and Referral

- We provide information about developmental disabilities and direct you to the resources you need for services or additional information.
- We also have an extensive lending library with topics ranging from education to health issues. This library is available to you, your child's educators, and health professionals.

Education and Training

- Workshops are coordinated and presented on topics relevant to the issues facing persons with disabilities and their families. Call our office or visit our website today for topics, times and locations.

Family to Family Support

- We will link families with similar experiences who can provide emotional support, specific information, and guidance.
- Our Family to Family Support program can help families navigate through difficult times and also share the joys of our children's ABILITIES.



NEW YEAR NEW ME

PERSONAL GROWTH TIPS: BUILDING POSITIVITY ONE SMALL STEP AT A TIME LIFE'S STORMS CAN FEEL OVERWHELMING, BUT EVEN SMALL HABITS CAN NURTURE A POSITIVE MINDSET. THIS GUIDE SUGGESTS SIMPLE, MONTHLY STEPS TO HELP YOU FOCUS ON GRATITUDE, SELF-COMPASSION, AND MINDFULNESS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. EACH HABIT BUILDS ON THE PREVIOUS ONES, CREATING A FOUNDATION FOR LONG-LASTING PERSONAL GROWTH.

JANUARY: START A GRATITUDE JOURNAL WRITE DOWN THREE THINGS YOU'RE GRATEFUL FOR EACH DAY. THEY CAN BE AS SIMPLE AS A KIND WORD, A SUNNY MORNING, OR FINISHING A TASK. REFLECT ON YOUR ENTRIES WEEKLY TO SEE THE POSITIVE PATTERNS IN YOUR LIFE.

FEBRUARY: PRACTICE DAILY AFFIRMATIONS BEGIN EACH DAY BY SAYING ONE POSITIVE AFFIRMATION ABOUT YOURSELF OR YOUR LIFE. EXAMPLES: "I AM CAPABLE OF OVERCOMING CHALLENGES." "I DESERVE PEACE AND HAPPINESS." PLACE THESE AFFIRMATIONS WHERE YOU'LL SEE THEM, LIKE ON YOUR MIRROR OR FRIDGE.

MARCH: TAKE A MINDFUL MINUTE SET ASIDE ONE MINUTE A DAY TO FOCUS ON YOUR BREATH. INHALE DEEPLY FOR FOUR COUNTS, HOLD FOR FOUR, EXHALE FOR FOUR. THIS SMALL PRACTICE HELPS REDUCE STRESS AND RECENTERS YOUR MIND.

APRIL: LIMIT NEGATIVE INFLUENCES IDENTIFY ONE THING IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT THAT BRINGS NEGATIVITY (E.G., TOO MUCH NEWS, CERTAIN SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS). REPLACE IT WITH SOMETHING POSITIVE, LIKE UPLIFTING PODCASTS OR SPENDING MORE TIME WITH SUPPORTIVE FRIENDS.

MAY: CELEBRATE SMALL WINS EACH DAY, WRITE ONE SMALL ACCOMPLISHMENT. WHETHER IT'S GETTING OUT OF BED ON A TOUGH DAY OR COMPLETING A SMALL CHORE, GIVE YOURSELF CREDIT FOR PROGRESS.

JUNE: PRACTICE KINDNESS DO ONE KIND THING FOR SOMEONE EACH WEEK—WRITE A THANK-YOU NOTE, HELP A NEIGHBOR, OR COMPLIMENT A FRIEND. ACTS OF KINDNESS CAN LIFT YOUR SPIRITS AS MUCH AS THE RECIPIENT

JULY: CREATE A JOY LIST MAKE A LIST OF ACTIVITIES OR THINGS THAT BRING YOU HAPPINESS, NO MATTER HOW SMALL (E.G., LISTENING TO MUSIC, ENJOYING A FAVORITE MEAL). SCHEDULE ONE OF THESE ACTIVITIES WEEKLY.

AUGUST: BUILD A POSITIVE MORNING ROUTINE START THE DAY WITH ONE UPLIFTING HABIT: STRETCH FOR 5 MINUTES. READ A MOTIVATIONAL QUOTE. AVOID CHECKING YOUR PHONE FIRST THING IN THE MORNING.

SEPTEMBER: EMBRACE SELF-COMPASSION WHEN YOU FACE SETBACKS, TALK TO YOURSELF AS YOU WOULD A DEAR FRIEND. REMIND YOURSELF: "IT'S OKAY TO STRUGGLE. I'M DOING MY BEST."

OCTOBER: REFLECT ON YOUR STRENGTHS EACH WEEK, WRITE ABOUT A CHALLENGE YOU'VE OVERCOME IN THE PAST. REFLECT ON THE STRENGTHS YOU USED AND HOW THEY CAN HELP IN FUTURE STORMS.

NOVEMBER: PAUSE FOR GRATITUDE DURING STORMS WHEN FACED WITH A TOUGH MOMENT, PAUSE AND NAME ONE THING THAT'S STILL GOING RIGHT. THIS HABIT TRAINS YOUR BRAIN TO FOCUS ON THE POSITIVES EVEN IN DIFFICULT TIMES.

DECEMBER: PLAN FOR REST AND REJUVENATION SCHEDULE REGULAR MOMENTS FOR SELF-CARE, SUCH AS A RELAXING BATH, A WALK IN NATURE, OR QUIET READING TIME.

Schedule Regular Self-Care Moments

- ****Incorporate soothing practices**** like a relaxing bath, a nature walk, or quiet reading time into your routine.
- ****Prioritize rest**** as a fundamental aspect of positivity.

Final Thoughts: Small Steps, Big Impact

Life's challenges might seem overwhelming, but these small habits can help you discover moments of peace, gratitude, and personal growth. Remember, it's perfectly fine to take one step at a time—each step brings you closer to a brighter, more positive mindset.

2026 Legislative Roundtable **Region 8**

Have a voice in 2026! Join LaCAN & LADDC for a Legislative Roundtable open to families, advocates, individuals with disabilities, and community partners to discuss upcoming legislative priorities for the developmental disability community.

SAVE THE DATE!

***Friday,
February 20***

11A - 1:30P

Join us IN-PERSON or VIRTUALLY!

Host Site: LA Baptist Childrens Home
Rucker Austin Building
7200 Desiard Street, Monroe, LA 71203

Lunch provided with for in-person attendees with RSVP.

In-Person Registration: tinyurl.com/8RTINP

Zoom Registration: tinyurl.com/REG8RTV



LACAN

LOUISIANA COUNCIL'S ADVOCACY NETWORK



INVEST IN PEOPLE INCREASE WAIVER RATES & DIRECT SUPPORT WORKER PAY

WHAT CAN LEGISLATORS DO

LDH needs to use clear rate-setting methods for HCBS waivers

Funding is needed to increase rates **AND** DSW pay to strengthen the workforce and improve health outcomes

WHY THIS MATTERS

Louisiana's Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waivers help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities live in their communities, not institutions.

Direct Support Workers (DSWs) provide the daily support that makes community living possible.

Today, low funding and outdated payment rates are creating a workforce crisis that puts these services—and the people who rely on them—at risk.

WHY ACTION IS NEEDED

- Rates don't cover real costs. Providers struggle to operate
- Some stop serving people with higher needs or close altogether
- Workers are leaving. DSW pay is too low, and Louisiana ranks among the lowest in the nation
- Staff shortages disrupt services. People may miss care or lose trusted workers who are like family
- Families fill the gaps. Many cut back work hours or leave jobs to provide unpaid care

The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) completed a study to review HCBS waiver rates, but it has not been made public. LDH has shared an **unofficial estimate of \$53.6 million in state general funds** needed to address study findings.



January 16, 2026



INVEST IN LOUISIANA REHABILITATION SERVICES

WHAT CAN LEGISLATORS DO

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) needs \$6.7 million in State General Funds to receive all \$72 million in federal matching funds for our state

WHY DO THIS

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) helps people with disabilities prepare for, find, and keep jobs

LRS provides job training, career counseling, and assistive technology

When funding increased last year:

- 22% more people applied for services
- 35% increase in new service approvals

WHY ACTION IS NEEDED

- \$155 million in federal funds lost over 5 years
- Funding that could have put people with disabilities to work
- Staff shortages limit timely services at LRS
- Long waits and denied services are the result
- Investing means valuing talent, work, and independence of people with disabilities

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS

- Every \$1 Louisiana invests brings \$3.69 from the federal government
- More people with disabilities can get jobs and earn a paycheck
- Working people pay taxes and help grow Louisiana's economy
- Fewer people need public assistance and benefits
- Individuals and families have a better quality of life



LACAN

LOUISIANA COUNCIL'S ADVOCACY NETWORK



EMERGENCY ALERT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

WHAT CAN LEGISLATORS DO

Louisiana needs an emergency alert for people with disabilities who go missing, wander, elope or may be in danger

Sen. McMath is working on a bill to make this alert a reality

WHY ACTION IS NEEDED

- 25 - 50% of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders or Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities wander or go missing at some point
- They may not understand when a situation is unsafe, such as bad weather, traffic, water or unsafe places
- Current alerts don't cover these situations- Amber Alerts are for abducted children and Silver Alerts are for older adults
- It takes minutes to get confused, injured or worse

WHY DO THIS

Louisiana does not have a dedicated alert for people with disabilities who go missing or are in danger. This new alert could help people with:

- Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)
- Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
- Complex medical needs
- Serious mental health or emotional needs

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS

- Keeps people with disabilities safe
- Helps first responders and the public act quickly and follow clear steps
- Gives families and caregivers peace of mind
- Raises community awareness about disability inclusion and safety
- Saves lives by helping people return home faster



HOW FEDERAL BUDGET CHANGES WILL FINANCIALLY IMPACT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

While the new federal budget will have an impact in many people's lives, the disability community will likely be navigating additional adjustments as varying pieces of the new bill are put into place. It's important for people with disabilities to be aware of all of the potential changes coming their way, so they can best prepare and make necessary changes to try and maintain financial stability.

DISABILITY IS A SPECTRUM

Before we dive into the changes coming that might impact people with disabilities, it's important to understand that not every person with disabilities will be impacted by every change mentioned. There is a huge spectrum of disabilities that results in different access needs, daily impact, required resources, and support. This guide is meant to provide generalized support for people who are more likely to be affected by the upcoming federal budget changes.

MEDICAID

The new federal budget bill includes nearly \$1 trillion in cuts to Medicaid and changes to qualifications like work requirements, eligibility, and administrative processes. While disabled people are not explicitly mentioned in the changes, many disabled people rely on Medicaid coverage for medications, care, and services. As the Center for American Progress and The Arc [lay out in a recent joint article](#), some people with disabilities may experience a loss in coverage, and many will experience increases in their costs for medical care due to rising copays and fewer benefits and out-of-pocket costs being covered.

WORK REQUIREMENTS

Work requirements have become stricter with limited exemptions. This means people with disabilities and caretakers are more likely to lose coverage. According to [The Arc of Massachusetts](#), most Medicaid recipients who are able to work are already working. Those who aren't working generally want to but struggle to find suitable jobs due to a lack of support and other barriers to employment. While there are some exemptions to the work requirements, exemptions are often burdensome and challenging to prove. Some people may lose coverage simply for not being able to keep up with paperwork.

ADMINISTRATIVE HURDLES

Similar to the work requirement changes, there will also be changes in eligibility redeterminations, which will now occur twice a year instead of annually. The verification requirements will also be stricter. Together, these changes will cause more opportunities for errors and missed deadlines, which will likely lead to many people inadvertently losing access to their Medicaid. Limited resources will also have to be allocated to implementing these requirements, which means that there will be even less resources for Medicaid programs and benefits.

HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES

One of the biggest direct impacts for people with disabilities that advocates are particularly worried about is [the impact on home and community-based services \(HCBS\)](#) that usually provide disabled people and older adults with daily assistance for tasks such as eating, dressing, using the bathroom, and getting to work. HCBS includes:

- Personal care attendant programs
- In-home nursing care
- Therapies
- ...and much more

In a [letter to senators](#), disability organizations noted that 86% of optional Medicaid spending is used for services and support for people with disabilities and older adults, more than half of which is for HCBS. Without these services, people with disabilities who rely on this assistance will lose some of their independence, may have a harder time making it to their jobs, or could require a family member to step in as a caretaker, affecting more people's ability to work and, therefore, have access to services like Medicaid.

There is already a huge waitlist for these services, but cuts to funding will make it even harder for people who need support to receive these services.

SNAP

In addition to the cuts to Medicaid, there will be [\\$200 billion in cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#), also known as food stamps. Many of the provisions added to Medicaid, like work requirements and eligibility changes, will apply to SNAP as well.

During a time when food insecurity is already a pressing challenge due to rising grocery costs and economic instability, this change could have a detrimental impact on the livelihood of many Americans, particularly low-income communities, communities of color, and disability communities. It is estimated that these cuts will impact 4 million non-elderly adults with disabilities who rely on SNAP.

Between the cuts to Medicaid and the cuts to SNAP, people with disabilities and caretakers who rely on both services could end up having to choose between feeding their families and purchasing life-saving medications.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The new bill imposes [stricter caps on student loans](#), particularly for grad students and parents. Because people with disabilities often experience a higher cost of living and could require special living or transportation accommodations to attend graduate school, caps on student loans could inadvertently prevent more people with disabilities from pursuing a higher education by making the financial burden too overwhelming for them to consider. This could also have a cyclic effect of then making it harder for people with disabilities to become employed throughout their lives.

RESOURCES

While these budget cuts will impact many disabled and low-income communities, there are resources to help prepare affected individuals with additional support and options:

- Disability advocates like [The Arc](#), [The American Association of People with Disabilities \(AAPD\)](#), and [Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund \(DREDF\)](#) are hard at work keeping communities updated with resources, pertinent information, and support.
- Protection and Advocacy (P&A) systems were established to safeguard the rights of individuals with disabilities. If you need legal representation, advocacy, or advice, each state has an agency you can turn to.
- Independent living centers and other local nonprofits are likely available in your area to provide support, housing help, and skill-building.
- Many community-focused credit unions, like Self-Help, offer services that can help you make good financial decisions, even in uncertain times. We offer [free financial coaching](#), [affordable loans](#), and options like [money market accounts](#) and [term certificates](#) to help you grow your savings.

With the new federal budget bill comes uncertainty and a potential hit to financial stability and independence for many people with disabilities. At Self-Help, we believe in ownership and economic opportunity for all, which means we are here to support underserved communities in building wealth and making responsible financial decisions.



Northeast Delta Human Services Authority Developmental Disabilities Services

How do I know if I am eligible for Northeast Delta HSA services?

A developmental disability means a severe, chronic disability of a person that:

- Is attributable to an intellectual or physical impairment or combination of intellectual and physical impairments
- Is manifested before the person reaches age 22
- Is likely to continue indefinitely
- Results in substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activity: self-care, receptive and expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, capacity for independent living, economic self-sufficiency
- Is not attributed solely to mental illness
- Reflects the person's need for a combination and sequence of special, interdisciplinary, or generic care, treatment, or other services of lifelong or extended duration, and are individually planned and coordinated

OR

- A substantial developmental delay or specific congenital or acquired condition in a person from birth through age nine; who, without support and services, has a high probability of resulting in those criteria listed above later in life that may be considered to be a developmental disability.

This information serves as a guideline. If you believe you or a member of your family may meet these criteria and need services, please contact us for additional information.

List of Services

Children's Choice Waiver offers supplemental support to children through age 18 who currently live at home with their families or with a foster family.

New Opportunities Waiver offers people age 3 and older who otherwise would require the level of care of an Intermediate Care Facility for the Developmentally Disabled (ICFs/DD) services that allow them to remain in their communities. Services are based on the need of the recipient and are developed using a person-centered process to formulate an individualized plan.

Supports Waiver offers focused, individualized vocational services to people age 18 and older who otherwise would require the level of care of an Intermediate Care Facility for the Developmentally Disabled (ICFs/DD).

Residential Options Waiver offers people of all ages services designed to support them to move from ICFs/DD and nursing facilities to community-based settings and to serve as an alternative to institutionalization.

Flexible Family Funds provides monthly stipends to families of eligible children with severe or profound developmental disabilities from birth to age 18 to help their families meet extraordinary costs. These subsidies are offered on a first-come, first-served basis.

Individual and Family Support provides assistance not available from any other resource that will allow people with developmental disabilities to live in their own homes or with their families in their own community.

What should I bring with me to my first appointment?

1. For students – IEP (Individualized Education Plan).
2. One or more of the following: Psychological Records, Medical Records, Work Assessment.
3. Insurance is not required, but please bring your insurance or Medicaid card if you have a policy.
4. Social security card or social security number.
5. Any custody documents if applicable.
6. Guardians must accompany children and adults who are under another person's guardianship, curatorship, etc. Although guardians may begin the application process for developmental disability service clients, we must meet with the person who will receive services prior to their treatment or receipt of services.

Where is the nearest clinic for developmental disabilities services?

[Developmental Disabilities Services Clinic](#)

3200 Concordia St.
Monroe, LA 71201

318-362-5188

Hours of Operation:

Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m



Caring for Children with Medical Complexities

Necessary and appropriate care for children with medical complexities is often difficult for families to access due to well-documented workforce shortages. Without this care, children with medical complexities are at higher risk of emergency room visits, hospitalization, and moving into institutional or residential settings.

Children with medical complexities represent less than 1% of all significant, specialized, and long-term health care needs.

- Children with medical complexities have one or more chronic and/or complex medical conditions that result in functional limitations and/or dependence on in-home nursing support and medical devices.
- The national home care workforce shortage is leaving families of children with medical complexities struggling to find the right care.

When families can't find providers for their children, family members are forced to leave the workforce to fill the gap often without compensation.

Related Discussion

- The impact of Family CNA programs on the health and well-being of children, their caregivers and families
- Opportunities to expand access to the model to reach more families
- Successful implementations and learnings from existing federal and state programs

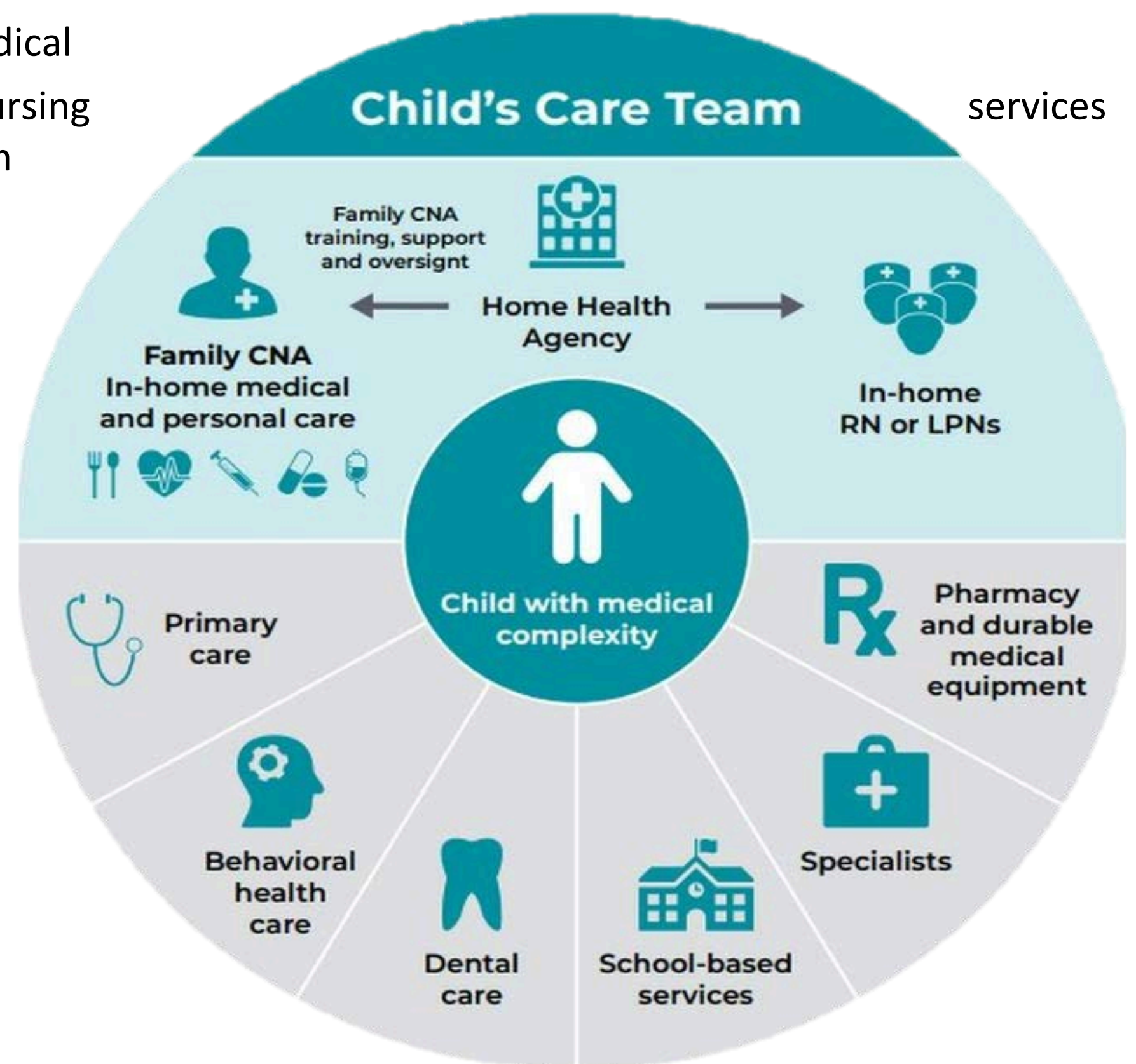
For more information, visit <https://vimeo.com/1134444177/b05c4955b0?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>

Family Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) Model

To help keep these children at home and improve outcomes, a growing number of state Medicaid programs are adopting programs like the Family Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) model. The Family CNA model trains

and pays family members to provide low-acuity in-home medical tasks to children alongside a team of health care professionals and under the supervision of a home health agency.

- Parents/Family members of children with medical complexities who qualify for private duty nursing are trained as a CNA. Training is at minimum equivalent to the training that other CNAs receive.
- Employed and paid by home health agencies
- Work closely with other homecare professionals
- Address critical home care workforce shortages
- Improve the continuity and quality
 - Support financial security
 - Offer technical skills and support they need to provide person-centered care.
 - Reduce likelihood of ED visits and inpatient hospitalizations.



Opportunities to expand the model:

- State:
 - Build a coalition of key constituencies
 - Leverage Medicaid authorities available
- Federal:
 - Issue guidance to states on a standardized definition, training and coding and billing
 - Invest in family caregiver training
 - Give technical assistance to states

For more information, visit <https://www.manatt.com/insights/webinars/the-family-cna-model-how-medicaid-can-help-improve-outcomes-for-children-with-medical-complexity>

Barbie Debuts Doll With Autism

For the first time, a Barbie doll with features designed to account for the ways in which individuals with autism experience the world is hitting the market.

Mattel, the maker of the iconic toy, said the doll has a new face sculpt and an eye gaze that's shifted to the side given that some people with autism avoid direct eye contact. In addition, the so-called "Autistic Barbie" will have articulating elbows and wrists to allow for stimming, hand flapping and other gestures, which are common among those on the spectrum.

The new doll comes with a fidget spinner, pink noise-cancelling headphones and a tablet displaying a symbol-based augmentative and alternative communication app. Autistic Barbie is outfitted with a loose-fitting dress to account for sensory-sensitivity and has flat Mary Jane shoes to promote stability, Mattel said.



The company spent more than 18 months working with the Autistic Self Advocacy Network to create the new Barbie.

"It is so important for young autistic people to see authentic, joyful representations of themselves, and that's exactly what this doll is," said Colin Killick, executive director of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network. "Partnering with Barbie allowed us to share insights and guidance throughout the design process to ensure the doll fully represents and celebrates the autistic community, including the tools that help us be independent."

The Barbie with autism is part of the Barbie Fashionistas collection, a lineup aimed at promoting inclusivity that offers over 175 options featuring various skin tones, eye colors, hair colors and textures, body types, disabilities and fashions.

Mattel already offers Barbie dolls with Down syndrome, blindness, hearing aids, wheelchairs, prosthetic legs and more.

The new Barbie with autism is available on the Mattel Shop and at Target for \$11.87. It will have a larger rollout at Walmart in March, the company said.

NEWS & INFORMATION

SNAP FOOD RESTRICTION WAIVER

If you receive SNAP benefits, the approval of Louisiana's Food Restriction Waiver means you will no longer be able to use your Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card to buy certain non-nutritious foods. This is designed to encourage healthier choices and help reduce obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and other diet-related health issues.

These changes aim to put nutrition-dense food back at the center of the SNAP program, enabling healthier lifestyles for Louisiana's families. If you live in a food desert with limited access to healthy options, consider utilizing programs like farmers' markets that accept SNAP.



The infographic is titled "SNAP FOOD RESTRICTION WAIVER" and is effective as of February 18, 2026. It is issued by the Louisiana Department of Health. It is divided into three main sections: "RESTRICTED ITEMS", "ALLOWED ITEMS", and a QR code for more information. The "RESTRICTED ITEMS" section is further divided into three categories: "SOFT DRINKS", "ENERGY DRINKS", and "CANDY".

RESTRICTED ITEMS

- SOFT DRINKS**
 - Any carbonated non-alcoholic beverage containing high fructose corn syrup or artificial sweeteners.
- ENERGY DRINKS**
 - Any beverage labeled as "energy" with stimulants (fortified caffeine, guarana, glucuronolactone, or taurine) and/or added sugar.
- CANDY**
 - Chocolate bars, chewy candy, hard candy, gum and mints, and candy-coated products.

ALLOWED ITEMS

- 100% fruit juice (no added sugar)
- Unsweetened sparkling water
- Beverages that contain cane sugar
- Flavored water without added sugar
- Fruit drinks with added sugar (Kool-Aid, fruit punch)
- Sports drinks (Gatorade, Powerade)
- Sweetened iced teas or lemonades
- Coffee and tea
- Plain water and sparkling water
- Milk and plant-based alternatives (soy, almond, oat)
- Sweetened baked goods (cookies, cakes, pastries)
- Granola bars and trail mix
- Breakfast cereals (even if sweetened)
- Pudding cups and yogurt

For more information, visit ldh.la.gov/SNAPWaiver or call 888-524-3578 (LAHELPU). USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

WHAT YOU CAN STILL BUY

- Fruits and vegetables
- Meats, poultry, and fish
- Dairy products like milk and cheese
- Breads, cereals, and grains
- Seeds and plants for growing food at home

WHAT YOU CAN'T BUY

- Soft drinks
- Energy drinks
- Candy (including gum and mints)

[LEARN MORE](#)

FIND A FOOD PANTRY NEAR YOU

If you or someone you know need help with food, the Food Bank offers several programs where you can receive free food such as food pantries, senior programs and mobile pantry distributions.

To find a food pantry near you, visit [This is our go to website for lots of things](#). [This is our go to website for lots of things](#). [This is our go to website for lots of things](#). [This is our go to website for lots of things](#).

[LEARN MORE](#)



The graphic features the title "Find a Food Pantry Near You" at the top. Below the title is a photograph of a man in a grey jacket and a woman in a black jacket standing next to a red car with its trunk open, which is filled with food bags. To the right of the photo is a map of Louisiana with several green location pins. At the bottom left is the "FOOD BANK" logo for Northeast Louisiana, and at the bottom right is the website address foodbanknela.org/find-food.

GRACE PLACE MINISTRIES

Grace Place Ministries (Monroe, LA) is a faith-based nonprofit offering meals, clothing, and hygiene/household items to the needy, operating a soup kitchen (M/W/F), food pantry, and clothes closet, driven by a mission to share Christ's love and meet basic needs, welcoming volunteers and donations to support their work.

- Mission: To serve the hungry, homeless, and needy in Monroe, LA, by providing food, clothes, and hope, following Jesus' teachings from Matthew 25.

Grace Place serves meals from 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. They have a food pantry distribution every second and fourth Thursday of the month from 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. The clothing closet is open on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 10:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.

* (318) 361 - 9702 *1600 Jackson Street, South Monroe, LA.

[LEARN MORE](#)

THE GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COUNCIL ON DISABILITY AFFAIRS
ANNOUNCED 2026 QUARTERLY MEETINGS DATES



ALL MEETINGS:

- BEGIN AT 9:00 AM
- ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
- HAVE A VIRTUAL OPTION
- HAVE INTERPRETERS UPON REQUEST

STARTING IN 2026 ASL INTERPRETERS FOR THE GACDA MEETING WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE BY REQUEST ONLY. THOSE WHO NEED ACCOMMODATIONS CAN REQUEST THE SERVICE VIA EMAIL OR BY PHONE.

ALL ACCOMMODATION REQUESTS SHOULD INCLUDE YOUR NAME AND THE MEETING DATE YOU ARE REQUESTING THE INTERPRETING SERVICE.

ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS, CONTACT:
EMAIL DISABILITY.AFFAIRS@LA.GOV
OR CALL 225-219-7553

2026 APPLICATIONS ARE NOW OPEN!



Louisiana's Youth Leadership Forum is back—and they are looking for the next generation of leaders!

• LAYLF is a FREE summer leadership camp for 10–12th graders with disabilities.

• July 9–12, 2026

• Free to attend (meals, lodging & 1:1 staff included!)

• Focused on empowerment, independence & confidence

• Part of a national movement uplifting youth with disabilities

To learn more, [click here](#).

SPECIAL OLYMPICS LOUISIANA: IMPORTANT PROGRAM REALIGNMENT FOR 2026



FOR MANY YEARS, SPECIAL OLYMPICS LOUISIANA HAS FOLLOWED A FAMILIAR COMPETITION SCHEDULE – ONE THAT HAS BROUGHT TOGETHER THOUSANDS OF ATHLETES, COACHES, VOLUNTEERS, AND FAMILIES TO CELEBRATE INCLUSION AND THE JOY OF SPORT.

AS THEY LOOK TOWARD THE FUTURE, THEY ARE TAKING INTENTIONAL STEPS TO ENSURE THAT THEIR PROGRAMS REMAIN STRONG, SUSTAINABLE, AND CENTERED ON WHAT MATTERS MOST – PROVIDING HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENCES FOR EVERY ATHLETE.

BEGINNING IN 2026, SOLA WILL IMPLEMENT A REALIGNED COMPETITION SCHEDULE THAT PRESERVES ALL SPORTS WHILE CONSOLIDATING AND STRENGTHENING THEIR STATEWIDE EVENTS.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE NEW SPORTS SEASON SCHEDULE, CLICK THE BUTTON BELOW.

REMEMBER, ALL ATHLETES MUST REGISTER IN THE REGISTRATION PORTAL BEFORE THEY CAN PARTICIPATE. CLICK THE BUTTON BELOW TO REGISTER IN THE ATHLETE PORTAL.**

[CLICK HERE FOR SEASONAL GAMES](#)

[CLICK HERE FOR THE ATHLETE PORTAL](#)

MARDI GRAS 2026 FAMILY GUIDE: PARADES, FUN, AND LOUISIANA TRADITIONS

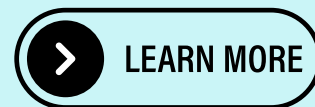
Mardi Gras in Louisiana: A Family Tradition

Mardi Gras in Louisiana is more than just a celebration; it's a cherished family tradition brimming with music, vibrant colors, and unforgettable moments for your children. From intimate carnival festivities in small towns to grand parades in larger cities, the 2026 Mardi Gras season provides numerous opportunities for families to experience the enchantment in a way that is inviting, inclusive, and enjoyable for all ages.

- Whether your family enjoys:
 - Catching beads
 - Watching marching bands
 - Embracing community traditions

Planning ahead can help you select parades that cater to your child's needs, such as daytime routes, sensory-friendly spaces, or shorter parade schedules. No matter how you choose to celebrate, Mardi Gras is all about togetherness, joy, and creating lasting memories, one parade at a time. To learn more, [click here](#)

SAFE & ACCESSIBLE MARDI GRAS TIPS FOR OUR ADA COMMUNITY



EMPOWERING FAMILY VOICES THROUGH SELF-ADVOCACY

Empowering Self-Advocacy at SARTAC

At the Self Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center (SARTAC), the mission is to enhance the self-advocacy movement for individuals with developmental and intellectual exceptionalities. This is achieved by offering tools, guidance, and resources that enable individuals to express themselves confidently.

Key Offerings:

- ****Practical Information****: Gain insights into the meaning of self-advocacy and access support for:
 - Decision-making
 - Leadership development
 - Community involvement

All resources are created for self-advocates, by self-advocates and their allies.

Families can utilize these tools to better assist their loved ones in:

- Developing self-advocacy skills
- Connecting with support groups
- Navigating challenges together

The goal is to foster independence, self-determination, and meaningful participation in all aspects of life, including school, work, and community.

[*Learn More Here*](#)

MEDICAID HEALTH PLANS

Simplifying Your Medicaid Health Plan Choice

Selecting a Medicaid health plan can seem daunting, but Louisiana offers a straightforward comparison tool to ease the process. The MyPlan Healthy Louisiana website allows families to compare available Medicaid plans side-by-side, enabling you to identify:

- Covered doctors
- Additional benefits
- How each plan caters to your child's specific health requirements

Whether your family requires specialty care, behavioral health services, or coordinated support for a child with a disability or chronic condition, this tool empowers you to make an informed decision. Taking just a few minutes to compare plans can help ensure your family receives the care, providers, and services that suit your needs now and in the future.

[*Learn More Here*](#)

OFFICE OF PUBLIC HEALTH'S SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTER DIRECTORY 2025-2026 SCHOOL YEAR

Families should be aware that School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) are an important resource for many Louisiana students during the school year. These centers offer medical and behavioral health services to students at no cost to parents, helping to minimize missed school days and overcome barriers to care. SBHCs are located in or near schools across various parishes and are supported by reputable health providers, school systems, and community organizations. If your child's school has a School-Based Health Center, you can access support for routine health needs, emotional well-being, and early intervention in a familiar and convenient setting that prioritizes students and families.

Everyday Wellness

- Checkups
- Physicals to play sports
- Coaching on healthy habits
- Help with diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure and more

Mental & Emotional Health

- Counseling

Medical Services

- Blood tests
- Vaccines/shots
- STI Testing
- Illness and injury care

Other Helpful Services

- Help finding outside doctors and specialists
- Help with health insurance

[▶ LEARN MORE](#)

CELEBRATE MARDI GRAS SEASON THROUGH ART!



The Northeast Louisiana Arts Council & Twin Cities Krewe de Riviere invite students, families, and classrooms across Region 8 to take part in our mARTi Gras Mask Project - a fun, free, no-pressure art activity for kids of all ages.

Download our printable Mardi Gras mask template, decorate it with crayons, markers, paint, feathers, sequins, glitter, or any embellishments you have at home or in the classroom. Let imagination lead the way!

How to Participate:

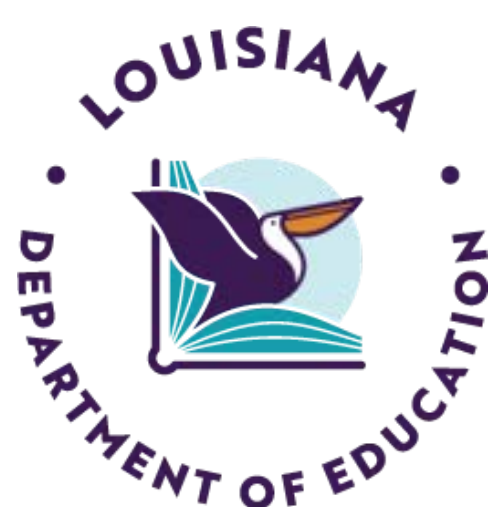
- Download the free mask template at [Your paragraph text](#)
- Decorate your mask with any materials you'd like - simple or elaborate!
- Take a photo of the finished creation
- Tag @region8arts on Facebook or Instagram or email your photo to abigail@nelarts.org

We'll be featuring shout-outs to young artists throughout Mardi Gras week! No competition. No cost. Just creativity, celebration, and community pride across Northeast Louisiana.

Let the good times ART!

- Northeast Louisiana Arts Council, in partnership with Twin Cities Krewe de Riviere
- Instagram + Facebook: @region8arts
- Email: abigail@nelarts.org
- Website: [Your paragraph text](#)





Understanding Louisiana's School Attendance Laws

Did you know that Louisiana mandates school attendance for all children aged 5 to 18? According to R.S. 17:221, parents and guardians are responsible for ensuring that their children attend school regularly, while the state and school districts work together to enforce these regulations.

Supporting Students' Mental Health

Louisiana also acknowledges the significance of mental health support for students. Children are permitted a limited number of mental health days, and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) can include provisions for absences related to mental health. With appropriate documentation, these absences should not be classified as truancy.

Families can educate themselves further by reviewing the following laws:

- ****Compulsory Attendance**** (R.S. 17:221)
- ****Duties of Attendance Officers**** (R.S. 17:230)
- ****School Responsibilities for Tracking Absences**** (R.S. 17:232)

By understanding these laws, families can advocate effectively for their children and ensure they receive the necessary support for successful school attendance.

[*Learn More Here*](#)

Special Education Services



Families Helping Families is here to support and empower parents to become effective advocates for their children receiving special education services. For questions, concerns, or just more information about the IEP process, or other special education topics, please call us today!

Available Services:

- One-on One support and consultation
- In-person and Virtual Workshops

Have Questions? Get Assistance at:

edspecialistregion8@fhfnela.org
Ph: 318.361.0487
Fax: 318.361.0236



DYSLEXIA CORE ASSESSMENT SUPPORT PROGRAM



If your child was recently identified as at risk for dyslexia through a school screening, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) offers support to help families pay for next steps.

- Families may receive up to \$500 per student, per year toward the cost of a Dyslexia Core Assessment
- The assessment must be completed by an LDOE-approved provider
- Providers set their own pricing; families may be responsible for any costs above \$500
- Approved providers are paid directly through the program

WHAT IS A DYSLEXIA CORE ASSESSMENT?

A Dyslexia Core Assessment is a more in-depth evaluation that helps determine whether a student has dyslexia or needs additional literacy support. The assessment may include:

- ✓ Reading and language skill checks
- ✓ A review of academic performance
- ✓ Word reading and decoding activities
- ✓ A brief family interview

To learn more or begin the process, families may visit the LDOE Dyslexia Support for Families webpage.

Scan the QR code for:

- Step-by-step guidance
- Access to the secure application portal
- A list of approved providers



Dyslexia Core Assessment Support Program

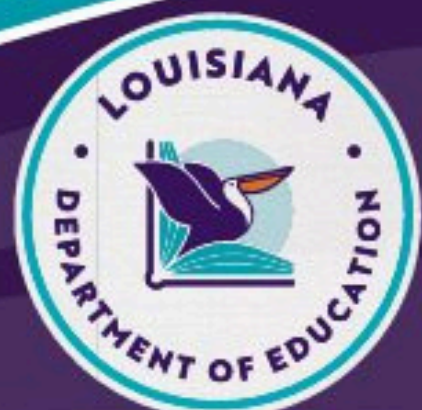
If your child was recently identified as at risk for dyslexia through a school screening, help is available!

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) offers up to \$500 per student, per year toward a Dyslexia Core Assessment with an approved provider.

- Providers are paid directly
- Families may only pay costs above \$500
- Must use an LDOE-approved provider

Don't miss this opportunity to get the support your child deserves!

Click [this link](#) to learn more.



WORKFORCE READY: LA WORKS & VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

Discover how Vocational Rehabilitation services empower individuals with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, and maintain meaningful employment. This webinar explores key supports, eligibility pathways, and strategies for maximizing impact through collaborative planning and advocacy.

Wednesday

FEB 4th

10:00 AM - 11:00 AM

**Presenter: Trevor Barber,
District Supervisor
Louisiana Rehabilitation Services**



Link to Register:

<https://tinyurl.com/VOCREHAB8>



*For questions or more information, please call 318.361.0487
or email edspecialistregion8@fhfnela.org.*



LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOL AND LIFE- PART 2, THE LAW

**Maryury Templet/Karen Scallan,
FHF of GNO**

Hope Miller, FHF NELA

Tuesday, February 5, 2026

1:30 PM - 2:30 PM



REGISTER NOW
<https://tinyurl.com/21026LeastRestrictivePt2>



JOIN OUR LUNCH AND LEARN

The Path to Success: Making your child's educational environment work for their needs "

This practical training is Part 1 of a 2-part series that will help parents understand why challenging behaviors happen and learn practical tips to address concerns. The focus is on inclusion and supporting children at home, school, and in the community.

Presenter:
Kimberly Peters, M.S., BCBA.

Tuesday, February 10, 2026

11A M to 12:30 PM

**Location: Families Helping Families,
5200 Northeast Road, Monroe**

**Limited Seating.
RSVP Here: <https://tinyurl.com/3z2bwphj>**



Scan Here To Register



[CLICK HERE](#)

[CLICK HERE](#)



March: Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

Orange is the official color representing Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. This vibrant hue was selected to symbolize positivity and energy, highlighting that individuals with disabilities are valuable, active members of our society. It conveys the message that disabilities do not have to be viewed as negative experiences. Encourage your friends, family, and coworkers to wear orange in support of this cause and to help spread awareness.
****Wear orange!****

Celebrating World Down Syndrome Day on March 21st



Did you know that March 21st is designated as World Down Syndrome Day? This special day was established to honor the lives of individuals with Down syndrome and to advocate for their equal freedoms and opportunities. The date, 21/3, symbolizes the three copies of chromosome 21, which is characteristic of those with Down syndrome.

Since 2012, World Down Syndrome Day has been recognized officially on the United Nations calendar. You can explore the complete history of this significant day at the bottom of this page. Each year on March 21st, Down Syndrome International encourages everyone to participate in a themed call to action aimed at promoting the human rights of people with Down syndrome. They collaborate with members to organize global activities and discussions.

JOIN US FOR A WEBINAR

COMMUNITY & FAMILY SUPPORTS FOR INDIVIDUALS W/ DD

- Learn about the home & community-based services and supports available for families
- Importance of advocacy for promoting inclusion
- Learn ways you can be involved in grassroots advocacy

**MONDAY,
FEB. 16
10AM TO 11AM**

Register for Zoom link:
tinyurl.com/DDACT378

For questions or more information,
contact: (318) 361-0487



HAMPCO INC. & WANDA'S ABOUNDING GRACE

Walk Around the Block for AUTISM

Celebrating Community Inclusion!

April 4th | 9-12 PM
NELSOB (Back Parking Lot)
24 Accent Dr., Monroe, LA

- Fun Run
- Kid's Zone
- Food
- Music
- Community Support
- Easter Egg Hunt

REGISTER NOW!
\$25

www.runsignup.com

Donations, Sponsorships & Community Partners Welcomed!

Call Brenda Johnson or Shontae Johnson
318-323-2141 or 318-680-5257
info@wandasag.org

APPLICATION NOW OPEN

FAMILY RELIEF EFFORT

APPLY FOR ASSISTANCE:
unitedwaynela.org/family-relief-effort

If you need help completing the application or connecting to other available resources, dial 211 – a free, confidential call available 24/7.

ART IS THERAPY FESTIVAL

SAVE THE DATE

APRIL 11th 2026

MONROE RIVER MARKET

ANNUAL FAMILIES HELPING FAMILIES – TOUCH A TRUCK-TRICK OR TREAT EVENT

DEAR FRIENDS,

Another Touch a Truck & Trick or Treat Event is behind us and what an incredible event it was! We are thrilled to report that more than 3,000 people attended this year's event and we had more than 76 vehicles on site for the kids to touch, climb, and explore.

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.

The safe atmosphere and friendly volunteers are what made this event possible. We would like to thank those that 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!

We would also like to thank each family that included our event as part of your family fun. The admission cost you paid to attend generates the funding to allow us to continue to offer the services we provide that are not covered by other funding sources. We love seeing all the happy faces and can't wait to see you again!

We are blessed to have to have a community that supports Families Helping Families and all those we serve!

God Bless,
Stacey Guidry
Executive Director



TOUCH-A-TRUCK



TRICK OR TREAT

SPONSORS

Thank you!

- HEALTHY BLUE
- JTB RENTALS
- RAISING CANE'S
- NORTHEAST DELTA HUMAN SERVICES AUTHORITY
- ENTERGY
- ST. FRANCIS MEDICAL CENTER
- SENATOR JAY MORRIS
- 21.WARRIOR MEDIA
- FASTSERV MEDICAL
- GRACE PLACE
- DKS MOBILE GROOMING
- GUIDRY PAINTING

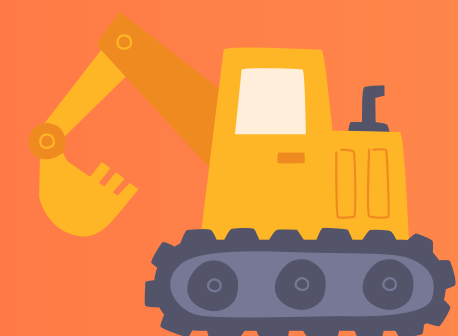
- WASTE CONNECTIONS OF MONROE
- SOUTHERN STATES EQUIPMENT
- THE TRASH GUYS
- BUILDING FUTURES PEDIATRIC THERAPY
- B1 BANK
- BELIEVE & ACHIEVE THERAPY CENTER
- ACADIAN AMBULANCE

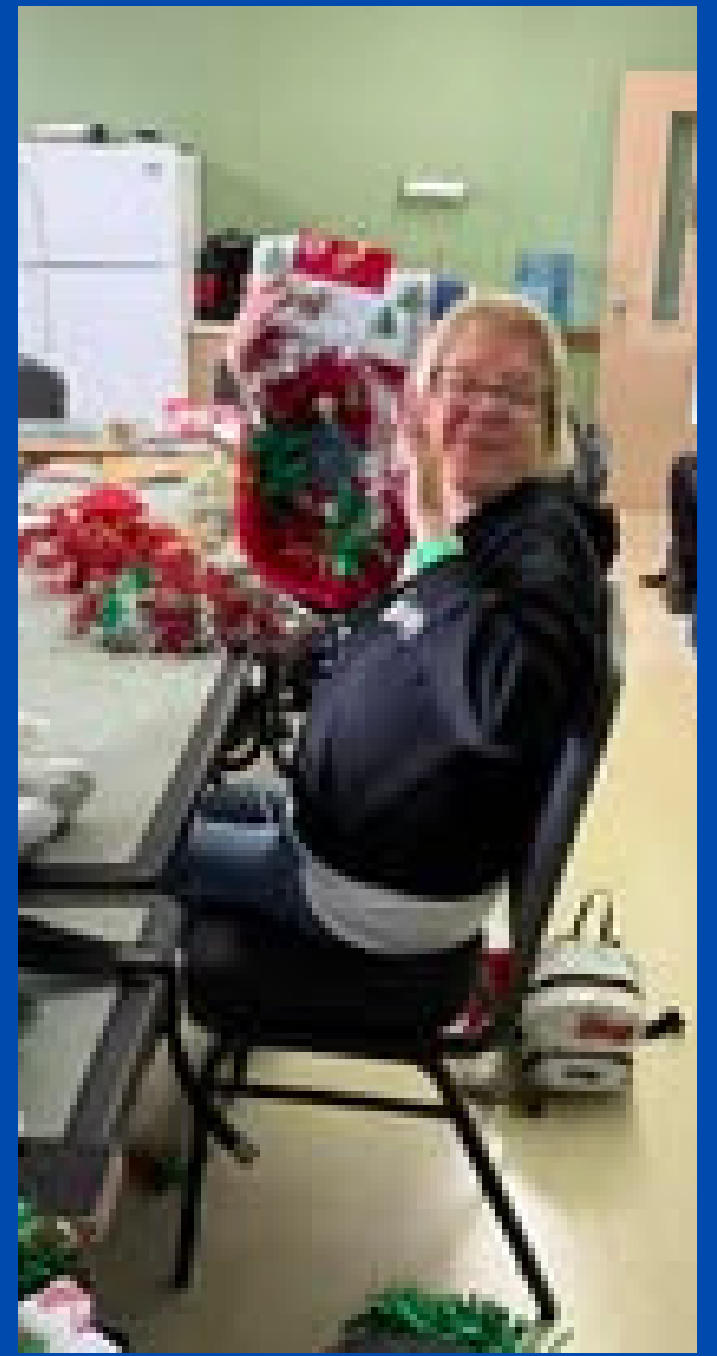


2025 VEHICLE PARTICIPANTS

- DONNIE PLUNK'S TOWING
- WASTE CONNECTIONS
- SILVER WATER PUMPING
- LOUISIANA STATE TROOPERS AIR SUPPORT UNIT
- DKS MOBILE GROOMING
- PAFFORD AIR ONE
- T&T AUTO REPAIR
- UNION PARISH LIBRARY
- THE TRASH GUYS
- LDWF ENFORCEMENT
- AIR EVAC 100 - RAYVILLE
- CONSOLIDATED TRUCK PARTS
- MEL'S TOWING
- STORM'S SERVICE
- SOUTHERN STATES EQUIPMENT
- BRUCKNER TRUCK SALE INC
- ACADIAN AIR MED
- MONROE PLICE DEPARTMENT
- AMERICAN RED CROSS
- POLAR SPRAY FOAM & INSULATION SERVICES

- WEST MONROE POLICE DEPARTMENT
- LOUISIANA STATE POLICE DEPARTMENT
- OUACHITA PARISH SHERIFF'S OFFICE
- WEST MONROE FIRE DEPARTMENT
- OUACHITA PARISH FIRE DEPARTMENT
- KIRKLAND TREE CUTTERS
- KENWORTH OF LOUISIANA
- ACADIAN AMBULANCE
- FASTSERV Medical
- PLUNKS WRECKER SERVICE
- JTB RENTALS
- ENTERGY
- SCOTT EQUIPMENT COMPANY
- DSMITH CLEARING
- MCDANIEL FARMS & LAND SERVICES
- ACADIAN AMBULANCE
- JTB RENTALS





**FHF
QUARTERLY
PHOTO RECAP**

.....

FHF enjoyed working in collaboration with our regional partners that allow us to provide outreach and peer support to our families. Enjoy a photo recap from some of these community activities.



Empowering people with disabilities to be active participants in their workplaces, activities and communities. It starts with everyday inclusion, confidence and self-determination.



NEDHSA is the single point of entry into the developmental disabilities system and oversees public and private residential services and additional services for those who have a developmental disability.

Services Offered:

- Flexible Family Fund
- ICF/DD Residential Services
- Individual and Family Support
- Support Coordination
- Supported Living
- Transition Services
- Vocational and Rehabilitative Services



The Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council was founded in 1970 as a result of the passage of the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act. The Louisiana Council was established in 1971. Councils were created to engage in advocacy, capacity building and systems change activities and contribute to a coordinated, consumer- and family-centered, and consumer- and family-directed comprehensive system of community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that enable individuals with developmental disabilities to exercise self-determination, be independent, productive, and integrated and included in all facets of community life.

Bureau of Family Health

BFH works to ensure that Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) in Louisiana have access to services are designed to minimize their disabilities and maximize their ability to live as independently as possible.

Children and youth who have special health care needs either have or are at increased risk for chronic physical, developmental, behavioral or emotional conditions. They require services beyond what other children require.

FHF Community Resource Specialists are available to help families connect to resources and services that can help them. They have the knowledge and skills to work families of children with special health care needs. Community Resource Specialists can help you and your child by providing:

- Tips for accessing services
- Peer and emotional support
- Referrals to medical and support services
- Connections to other parents with children and youth with special health care needs



“We are family members ourselves, with first hand knowledge of raising a child or youth with special health care needs.”

The Louisiana Family-to-Family Health Information Center Provides:

- Assistance to families and professionals in navigating health care systems
- Finding resources
- Peer to peer support
- Information, education, training, support and referral services to families with children and youth with special health care needs



In partnership with the LDOE, Families Helping Families Education Specialists provide support to school districts and families with children in Special Education in Region 8.

These parishes include: Morehouse, Lincoln, Union, Madison, West Carroll, East Carroll, Tensas, Jackson, Caldwell, LaSalle, Concordia, Catahoula, City of Monroe, Richland, Franklin, Ouachita.



LaCAN provides information and support to individuals wishing to effectively advocate for systems change in the areas of home and community-based services, education, and employment.

LaCAN advocates for service systems that support children and adults with disabilities to live in their own homes and be fully-included and participating members of their local schools and communities.