

April, May, & June 2026 Newsletter



Hello
Spring

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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.





Invest in Child Care. Invest in Louisiana.



Louisiana State Capitol

On **Tuesday, May 12**, early care and education providers, their staff, families, and community partners will come together to share their stories, uplift families, and show the strength of our numbers through coordinated program closures and a family and community-centered day of engagement at the Louisiana State Capitol.

Louisiana's Day Without Child Care is part of the National Day Without Child Care, a coordinated nationwide movement elevating the essential role of early learning in our economy and communities, with coordinated efforts taking place across 27 states.

Louisiana's Day Without Child Care is a provider-led, educator-led, parent-led, and business-led day of action demonstrating the essential role early care and education makes possible for Louisiana families, workforce, and economy — and what is at risk without sustained, long-term investment.

This day is about visibility, collective power, and ensuring decision-makers understand that child care is essential infrastructure for working families, businesses, and the future of our state.

[Click Here to Register!](https://www.geauxfarla.org/)

**Geaux
Far**
LOUISIANA

Visit us at: <https://www.geauxfarla.org/>

2026 LEGISLATIVE TRACKING

LaCAN is actively engaged in the 2026 legislative session, focusing on key priorities identified in the Council's official fact sheets and advocacy agenda.

Current efforts center on advancing legislation to:

- to establish an emergency alert system for individuals with developmental disabilities,
- increase funding for Louisiana Rehabilitation Services to improve employment outcomes
- secure critical investments in home and community-based services, including increased waiver rates and Direct Support Worker pay
- the restoration and sustainability of funding for Families Helping Families Centers

For an updated status on these issues and other important bills impacting the developmental disability community, check out the LA Developmental Disabilities Council's Bill tracking form:

[LADDC Tracking Sheet](#)



To learn about LaCAN and ways that you can participate in advocacy, contact your Region 8 LACAN Leader today!

Visit the website at:
www.lacanadvocates.org



10 SELF-ADVOCACY TIPS

Self-advocacy is when you use your voice to let others – especially decision makers – know what's important to you. When you self-advocate, you work to influence decisions that will affect your life, instead of having other people make decisions without your input.

1. Prioritize Your Goals

What are your self-advocacy goals? Your answers to this question will help you decide your next steps.

2. Know Your Rights

It is your right to understand the laws that determine your rights. You also have the right to receive information in your primary language and in alternative formats.

3. Keep Records

It is vital that you keep accurate records. Be sure to keep important documents in one safe place.

4. Prepare and Plan

Before a meeting, reflect on your goals, review your documents, and talk with people you trust to help you prepare.

5. Be Creative and Assertive

Make sure you keep your discussion short and to the point. Share when you disagree and collaborate to find the best solution for you.

6. Get Decisions in Writing

Keep track of your progress through documentation. If you disagree with a decision, ask for it in writing.

7. Right to Appeal

If you do not get a decision that you agree with, you have the right to challenge it.

8. Interim Solutions

While you wait for a decision to be made on your case, consider other options by exploring what resources are available to help you in the meantime.

10. Follow Up

Stay on top of any final deadlines and communications. Remember to thank those who have helped you in this process.

9. Review Documents

Review all agreements and action items to ensure everyone involved is on the same page, and sign only what you agree to.

Remember to thank those who provide assistance!

Programs for Voters With Disabilities, Senior Citizens and Nursing Home Residents



Closed-Party Primaries are coming to Louisiana elections beginning in 2026. Below is information to assist in exercising your right to vote.

Automatic Absentee Ballot Program for Voters with Disabilities

A voter who is physically disabled or who cannot appear in person to vote, either early or on election day because they are homebound, is eligible to apply for the Automatic Absentee Ballot Program. Proof of disability is required.

Proof of Disability

To enroll in the program, a voter must apply by submitting a Disabled Application for Absentee by Mail Ballot and submit proof of disability to your parish registrar of voters. Proof of disability may include one of the following:

- a letter from a physician, optometrist, physician assistant or nurse practitioner certifying the disability;
- a copy of a current mobility impaired identification card issued by the Office of Motor Vehicles; or
- a copy of a current documentation showing eligibility for disability benefits from either social security, veterans, paratransit services, Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities or benefits from Louisiana Rehabilitation Services.

If submitting proof of disability by mail, the voter must include a photo ID such as a La. driver's license, La. Special ID or other photo ID, with the voter's name and signature. If no photo ID is available, a letter listing the names and addresses of two persons residing in the precinct who could swear to the fact that the voter is physically disabled may be submitted.

The voter may choose whether to receive an absentee ballot only for one election or for all future elections. The application must be received by the registrar of voters by 4:30 p.m. on the 4th day before the election.

Automatic Absentee Ballot Program for Senior Citizens

Senior Citizens (voters 65 years of age or older) may apply for the program by completing the General Application for Absentee by Mail Ballot and checking that they are a senior citizen. They have the option of choosing to receive an absentee ballot only for one election or for all future elections. Beginning in 2029, senior citizens enrolled in the program will need to reapply every four (4) years.

The deadline to submit this application is 4:30 p.m. on the 4th day before the election.

Nursing Home Program

If you reside in a nursing home, veterans' home or a hospital for an extended stay for a physical disability and are unable to vote in person during early voting or at the polls on election day, you may apply with [this application](#) and enroll in the nursing home early voting program. Once accepted by the registrar of voters, the registrar or a deputy registrar will go to your home facility during a period of two weeks prior to the beginning of early voting through the last day of early voting. The registrar of voters will bring either a paper ballot or a portable voting machine and guide you through the process of casting your vote.

For more information, view the [Geaux Vote Website](#)

Building Healthy Habits

Healthy habits are important for everyone—but for the people who we serve and the caregivers who support them, they can be life-changing. By building simple, consistent routines around physical health, emotional well-being, and daily living skills, you can experience greater independence, improved quality of life, and stronger overall health

Why Healthy Habits Matter

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are at higher risk for certain health conditions, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, anxiety, and depression. Contributing factors may include limited access to healthcare, fewer opportunities for physical activity, medication side effects, and barriers to healthy food choices.

For caregivers, the demands of supporting others can also impact their own health. Long hours, stress, and limited time for self-care may increase the risk of burnout.

Making time to implement healthy habits can help:

- Improve energy and mood
- Reduce preventable health conditions
- Strengthen independence and daily living skills
- Support emotional regulation
- Improve sleep quality
- Reduce caregiver stress

When healthy habits are built together, they create a positive environment for everyone in the household or support system.

What Are Healthy Habits?

Healthy habits are small, consistent actions that support physical, mental, and emotional well-being. They don't need to be complicated—simple routines often work best. Some examples include:

1. Healthy Eating

Balanced nutrition supports growth, brain function, and energy levels.

Tips:

- Include fruits and vegetables at meals
- Choose water over sugary drinks
- Encourage simple meal prep skills (washing vegetables, stirring ingredients)
- Use visual recipes or step-by-step picture guides

For people with sensory sensitivities, gradual exposure to new foods and respecting texture preferences can make a big difference.

2. Physical Activity

Regular movement improves strength, coordination, mood, and heart health.

Examples:

- Daily walks
- Dancing to favorite music
- Chair exercises
- Stretching routines
- Adaptive sports programs

Even 10–15 minutes of movement at a time can have lasting benefits. Make it fun and part of a routine.

3. Good Sleep Habits

Sleep supports learning, emotional regulation, and overall health.

Healthy sleep routines include:

- Consistent bedtime and wake-up time
- A calming bedtime routine (bath, quiet music, reading)
- Limiting screen time before bed
- A comfortable, quiet sleep environment

If you support someone that struggles with bedtime routines, try implementing visual schedules to help with understanding and anticipation of bedtime steps.

4. Mental and Emotional Wellness

Mental health is just as important as physical health.

Encourage:

- Talking about feelings
- Using visual emotion charts
- Deep breathing exercises
- Mindfulness or relaxation techniques
- Participating in hobbies and preferred activities

Caregivers should also prioritize their own emotional health by connecting with support groups, taking breaks when possible, and seeking professional support when needed.

5. Preventive Healthcare

Regular medical, dental, and vision check-ups are essential. Caregivers can help by:

- Keeping an updated health record
- Preparing people for appointments using social stories
- Advocating for accessible communication and accommodations

Preventive care helps identify concerns early and supports long-term wellness.

Building Habits That Last

Healthy habits are most successful when they are:

- Simple
- Consistent
- Visual (charts, reminders, schedules)
- Celebrated (praise and positive reinforcement)
- Built around strengths and interests

Start small. Choose one habit to focus on at a time. For example, begin with a 10-minute daily walk or add one vegetable to dinner. Once that habit feels natural, add another.

END-OF-YEAR IEP CHECKLIST: 7 THINGS BEFORE SUMMER

Olivia Wilson

Guest expert

It's mid-March, and your inbox is already getting the "spring break" notices and end-of-year reminders from school. But if your child has an IEP, there's more on your plate than just making sure backpacks are cleared out.

I see this every year: parents get to August, realize they missed something critical at the end of spring, and spend summer scrambling to fix it. A triennial reevaluation wasn't scheduled. ESY services weren't requested. IEP goals were never reviewed. And nobody documented it in writing while the case manager could still access records.

You don't have to be that parent. This checklist gives you seven essential tasks to complete before school ends. Some are quick. Some need planning. All of them matter.

1. Confirm Your Annual IEP Review Is Scheduled (and It's Before June)

Federal law requires your child's IEP to be reviewed and revised at least annually. Most schools do this in spring. But "should be done" and "actually is on the calendar" are not the same thing.

What to do:

- Check your current IEP document. Find the date of the last annual review. Count forward one year. That's your deadline.
- Contact the school's special education office (typically your child's case manager) and confirm the annual IEP meeting is scheduled before school ends. Don't assume it is.
- If it's not scheduled, request it now. Don't wait until May or June when staff are thinking about summer.

What happens if you don't:

- The school could start next year operating under an IEP that's now legally overdue. This is technically a compliance violation.
- Goals from last year might not get reviewed or updated based on current progress.
- If your child's needs have changed (and they probably have), they won't be reflected in the IEP until you force another meeting.
- Service levels might not be adjusted, even if your child's progress warrants a change.

The inside scoop: Schools know the deadline. They're supposed to schedule by April to leave room for May/June meetings. If your school is slow to schedule, that's a red flag. Follow up in writing (email) if the date isn't locked in.

2. Check If a Triennial Reevaluation Is Due

Every three years, the school is required to reevaluate your child's eligibility and needs for special education. It's called a triennial reevaluation. Three years is a long time, and a lot can change. But schools sometimes let this deadline slip.

What to do:

- Find your child's last reevaluation report. Look at the date.
- Count forward three years. If that date is coming up in the next few months, the school should be planning the reevaluation now.
- If you're not sure when the last one was, ask. Request the evaluation report so you can see the date clearly.
- If a reevaluation is due, confirm with the school that they've scheduled it or are scheduling it for spring/early summer.

What to request in the reevaluation:

- Academic assessments if your child has academic disabilities.
- Speech/language testing if speech is a service.
- Occupational therapy or physical therapy assessments if relevant.
- Behavioral or social-emotional assessments if behavior is a concern.
- Updated IQ or cognitive testing if it's been three years.

What happens if you don't:

- The school might operate past the reevaluation deadline without updating your child's eligibility information. This is a compliance violation.
- Your child's current abilities and needs might not be accurately documented. If needs have changed (either improved or worsened), the IEP won't reflect it.
- If you need to challenge the IEP later, you'll be arguing based on outdated test data.
- If your child is approaching a transition point (like middle school or high school), you want fresh evaluation data to inform the transition plan.

The inside scoop: Reevaluations cost money and take time. Schools sometimes drag their feet. Don't let them. If it's due, push for it in spring so the results inform the annual IEP update.

3. Discuss and Request Extended School Year (ESY) Services

You've probably heard this term if you've been in special education for any length of time. But many parents don't understand what ESY is or whether their child qualifies. Now is the moment to ask.

What to do:

- At the annual IEP meeting, specifically ask: "Does my child meet the criteria for Extended School Year services?"
- If the team says yes, make sure ESY is written into the IEP with specific services, frequency, and duration.
- If the team says no, ask why. Get the explanation in writing (Prior Written Notice).
- If you think your child might need ESY but the school hasn't brought it up, raise it yourself. Bring data about regression during past breaks.

What to include in the discussion:

- How your child performed after winter break. Did they lose skills?
- Whether your child has crucial skills (like communication, behavior management, self-care) that need continuous practice.
- Whether your child is close to mastering an important skill and summer practice could push them over the edge.
- Any behaviors that worsen during extended breaks without therapeutic support.

For a complete guide to ESY eligibility and how to request it, see my detailed article on Extended School Year services.

What happens if you don't:

- If your child qualifies for ESY and you don't request it, you miss the summer window entirely. You can't request ESY in July when summer is half over.
- Your child loses skills over the break that take weeks or months to rebuild in the fall.
- The school won't proactively tell you about ESY. You have to ask.
- If the school denies ESY without a good reason, you'll have missed your window to challenge it.

The inside scoop: Schools budget for ESY in spring. Once the deadline passes, they're not adding services mid-summer. Request ESY by March or early April, or wait until next year.

4. Review IEP Goal Progress and Ask for Data

- Your child has IEP goals. They've been working on them all year. Now is the time to ask: are they on track? Is the progress good enough? Does the goal need to change?

What to do:

- At the annual meeting, ask to see progress monitoring data for each goal. This is data collected regularly throughout the year.
- Ask specific questions: "Is my child meeting this goal? At what rate of progress? Is that rate good enough?"
- If a goal hasn't been met, ask why. Is the instruction not working? Does the goal need to be revised? Is it time for a new goal?
- If a goal was mastered early in the year, celebrate that and discuss the next step. Does your child need a new goal or a modified version?
- Request that progress monitoring data be provided to you regularly, not just at annual meetings. Many schools will do a brief written update monthly or quarterly.

What to push back on:

- "We're making progress" without showing you the data. Progress is measurable. You should see the numbers.
- Goals that haven't changed in two or three years. Even if your child hasn't fully met the goal, the goal should be updated if priorities have shifted.
- Goals that are vague or unmeasurable. "Improve reading" is not a goal. "Read and comprehend grade-level passages with 80% accuracy" is a goal.

What happens if you don't:

- Goals that aren't working stay in place. Your child spends another year working on something that's not effective.
- You lose sight of whether your child is actually progressing. You might think services are helping when the data shows otherwise.
- Goals might stay on the IEP long after they're relevant to your child's actual needs.
- If you need to escalate a concern later (like "the school isn't providing adequate services"), you won't have baseline data to prove it.

The inside scoop: Progress monitoring is supposed to happen. Not every school does it consistently, but you can ask for it. If you see a pattern of no progress, that's a red flag about service quality or goal appropriateness.

5. Request Copies of All Educational Records and Progress Reports

This is administrative but crucial. Get everything in writing while the school year is still active and records are accessible.

What to do:

- Send a written request to the school's records office: "I am requesting copies of all educational records for my child, including progress monitoring reports, benchmark assessments, attendance records, and any evaluations or testing from this school year."
- Specify a deadline (give them 5-10 business days). Schools have 45 days maximum to provide records, but push for faster.
- Request records in digital format if possible (email, PDF). Make copies for your own files.
- Create a home file system or folder with all IEP documents, evaluations, progress reports, and correspondence. You'll need these for reference, and they're invaluable if you ever need to escalate a concern.

What to include in your records request:

- Current IEP and all prior IEPs (going back at least 3 years).
- All evaluation reports (psych testing, speech/language, OT, academic testing, etc.).
- Progress monitoring data from the entire year.
- Attendance records.
- Any incident reports, behavioral documentation, or discipline records.
- Benchmark assessment results.
- Teacher notes or comments from conferences.
- Correspondence between home and school (emails, notes).

What happens if you don't:

- Once summer hits, staff scatter. Good luck getting records in August.
- If you need documents to challenge something in the IEP, you'll have to request them when you're already in a dispute (slower process, more adversarial).
- You'll lose track of your child's progress over years. You won't see patterns or know whether services are actually working.
- If your child transitions to a new school or district, you might not have complete records to share.

The inside scoop: Schools are required to provide records. They might push back ("we need to redact information" or "we need to charge you a fee"), but you have rights. If they're slow, follow up. If they refuse, that's a compliance issue you can escalate.

6. If Your Child Is Changing Schools Next Year, Start Transition Planning

Spring is when families make summer school decisions. If your child will be at a different school next year (elementary to middle, middle to high, or moving to a new district), now is the time to get ahead.

What to do:

- Notify the school that your child is transitioning. They'll begin coordinating with the receiving school.
- Request a transition meeting before the end of the year. The current school should meet with the new school's representative to review the IEP and discuss how services will continue.
- Ask for a tour of the new school's special education setting, if applicable. Talk to the new case manager about your child's needs.
- Request that your current IEP be shared with the receiving school immediately (with your permission, of course).
- Discuss any concerns about the transition: Does the new school offer the same level of service? Will your child have a familiar aide or teacher during the transition?
- For a complete guide to school transitions and protecting your IEP, see my article on IEP school transitions.
- What happens if you don't:
- The receiving school might not get the IEP until days before school starts.
- Services might not be set up on day one. Your child could start at a new school without the support they need.
- You'll be scrambling in August to coordinate with a new team, rather than having built relationships in spring.
- If the new school isn't prepared, your child's IEP might not be implemented correctly during the critical transition period.
- **The inside scoop:** School transitions are common stress points for IEP implementation. Schools change. Case managers change. Aides change. Getting the current school and new school on the same page in spring makes the transition smoother and protects your child's rights.

7. Document Everything in Writing Before Staff Leave for Summer

This is the most overlooked step, and it's the most important. Before teachers, therapists, and case managers leave for summer, get everything documented.

What to do:

- Send emails summarizing any decisions made at the IEP meeting, any concerns you raised, and any commitments the school made. "Per our meeting on [date], the school will [specific commitment]. I'm confirming this in writing so we have documentation."
- If something was discussed verbally at the meeting but isn't clearly in the IEP, follow up in writing. "At the meeting, you mentioned that OT services might be increased next year. I want to confirm: will the IEP be revised in August to reflect this change?"
- Ask for progress reports in writing. "Please provide me with [specific child's name]'s progress monitoring data through the end of the school year. I'd like to see where we stand before summer."
- If you have concerns, document them in writing now. Don't wait until August. "I'm concerned that [specific concern]. I'm requesting [specific action]. Please respond in writing about how you plan to address this."

Why this matters:

- Over summer, staff are hard to reach. If something falls through the cracks, you won't know until fall.
- Written documentation creates a paper trail. If you later need to escalate a concern, you have evidence of what was promised and what happened.
- In my experience as a school administrator, things that aren't written down don't happen. Good intentions disappear. Staff turnover happens. Written commitments stick.

What happens if you don't:

- You'll have a hazy memory of what was said at the spring meeting. The school might remember it differently.
- If the school makes a commitment and then doesn't follow through in August, you have no proof they ever agreed to it.
- You'll be back to square one in the fall, trying to chase down decisions and commitments that should have been finalized in spring.

Your March-to-June Action Plan

Here's the timeline:

- **Now (Mid-March):** Confirm annual IEP meeting is scheduled, check triennial reevaluation deadline, request ESY meeting if needed.
- **Late March/Early April:** Attend ESY IEP meeting (if applicable). Get written decision about ESY.
- **April/May:** Attend annual IEP meeting. Review progress. Discuss goals. Plan for transitions if applicable.
- **May:** Request copies of records. Follow up on any unfinished business from the annual meeting.
- **End of May/Early June:** Send documentation emails confirming decisions and commitments. Confirm summer plans (ESY dates, location, transportation, if applicable).
- **Before summer break:** Review your file. Make sure you have copies of everything. Know what's been completed and what still needs attention.



The Human Development Center at LSU Health New Orleans needs your help!

Take this short survey to help them learn more about what people with disabilities in Louisiana need, what is working well, and what could be better. The survey is available online by scanning the QR, by phone, or on paper—whatever works best for you.

All survey responses are anonymous and answers will be kept private. If you start and change your mind, you can stop at any time. If you have any questions or need help, please contact, Dr. Krista James by phone at 504-556-7516 or email at kjames@lsuhsc.edu.



Louisiana Statewide Needs Assessment

Help Us Understand Disability Services Across Louisiana

Your Voice Matters!

*Share Your Experiences to Improve Services
for Individuals with Disabilities*



Long Wait Times



High Costs



Transportation Barriers



Confusing Systems

Who Can Participate?



Individuals with
Disabilities



Parents &
Caregivers



Educators
& Providers



Community
Advocates

Why Your Input Matters



Identify Service Gaps



Support Families



Improve Coordination



Build Inclusive Communities



Take Our Survey!

Scan the QR code or visit:

<https://bit.ly/4dcukUe>



LSU Health
NEW ORLEANS

School of Allied Health Professions
Human Development Center

Questions? Contact us: Dr. Krista James Phone: ☎ 504-556-7516



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The Arc and AT&T have joined forces on a nationwide program that is bringing digital skills training to people with disabilities and their families. Digital literacy is critical in today's world to learn, apply for jobs, be socially connected, and more. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, people with disabilities are three times more likely to not go online than people without disabilities.

The Arc, The Arc San Francisco, and AT&T have collaborated to create safe and accessible digital skills trainings that accommodate the different learning styles of people with disabilities.

Access Training Online

Training sessions are offered online free of charge and available 24/7 to complete at your own pace. Modules cover a range of topics, including:

- Getting started with a computer
- Introduction to email
- Navigating a website
- Using a mobile device
- Online safety, passwords, fraud, and scams
- And more

[View Training Modules](#)

ETSY-LIKE ONLINE MARKET LAUNCHES FOR SELLERS WITH DISABILITIES



In her mid-20s, Belle Meador found a love of crafting handmade greeting cards with her aunt and started selling them locally on social media.

What started as a hobby blossomed into a microbusiness for the young woman on the autism spectrum whose neurological disorder affects her ability to communicate and work full-time in traditional settings.

But autism doesn't affect her ability to make greeting cards for Hanukkah, Christmas, retirements, newborn babies and the Chinese New Year, or turn other forms of art into items people might want to purchase.

That skillset got her father, Dave Meador, a retired DTE Energy Co. executive, thinking about how Belle could market the items she makes to a wider audience of potential customers beyond the front-porch transactions on Facebook Marketplace.

Backed by nearly \$2 million in seed capital, including \$350,000 of his family's money, Dave Meador launched a not-for-profit, Etsy-like e-commerce website for sellers with disabilities who make items ranging from jewelry and Christmas tree ornaments to personalized tumblers.

Meador's now 30-year-old daughter is one of the first makers whose greeting cards and custom-made jars of slime were for sale when [TroveMarket.com](#) went live for buyers on Thanksgiving Day.

[Trove Market](#) charges its sellers a 3% commission fee for selling products on the platform, while the fees charged by for-profit e-commerce giants like Etsy, eBay and Meta's Facebook can climb into the neighborhood of 30%, depending on the item and the stack of fees. Their platform is inclusive and helps them keep more of what they earn. They don't have listing fees, advertising costs or hidden charges — so they keep more of every sale.

[Trove Market](#) was incorporated as a 501(c)3 charity under the Internal Revenue Service code, so its sellers are limited to annual earnings of 250% of the federal poverty level or \$39,125. It is a pathway for people with disabilities to gain a foothold in the economy with a microbusiness that can supplement their income.

Want to sell your products to a bigger market? [Visit Trove Market](#)

Want to buy something from an individual with a disability? [Visit Trove Market](#)

Want to become a partner? [Visit Trove Market](#)

[Take a Look At Trovemrsket](#)



STATE LIBRARY of LOUISIANA



The State Library of Louisiana. TBBL offers specialized services to Louisiana residents of all ages who are visually impaired, legally blind, have reading disabilities, or are unable to handle traditional books through the Talking Books and Braille Library; a special library-within-a library.

An affiliate of the Library of Congress's **National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled**, TBBL provides access to more than 164,000 audio and braille books, 25,000 large-print books, and playback machines to anyone with permanent or temporary disabilities.

There is no charge for TBBL

Reader advisors help patrons select materials. Additionally, TBBL dedicates a staff member to serve children up to age 18, allowing them to participate in statewide summer reading programs.

A TBBL technology demonstration area is part of the State Library's new Literacy and Learning Lab to support visitor awareness of available services.

For more information, visit the [website](#).

[Click here for specific services offered through TBBL](#)

[Click here to access the state library](#)

High Schooler Makes Braille Keyboards For Under \$10. Here's How

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By Vashli Harris | NJ.com

PRINCETON, N.J. — Three years ago, Umang Sharma could be found on his bedroom floor disassembling a computer keyboard to learn about the mechanisms that makes the device function. This act of deconstruction came after Sharma, then a Princeton Day School freshman, stumbled across an ad for a Braille keyboard priced at \$7,000.

"I couldn't accept that accessibility tools were priced out of reach for so many people," said Sharma, now a 17-year-old senior who plans to study engineering and computing in college. "I thought, 'if the core need is being able to type independently, why should that cost thousands of dollars?'"

After taking apart his first keyboard and watching several YouTube videos, Sharma created his first prototype, continued to retest variations for over a year, and figured out how recreate the device for under \$10 each.

"Instead of building an entirely custom electronic device, I start with a standard keyboard base, often discarded or donated, and I focus my engineering on the accessibility layer that matters most, which is tactile, readable, durable Braille keycaps," said Sharma, who launched the nonprofit Jdable in 2022 to design affordable devices to help improve the lives of people with disabilities.

Sharma said he's able to keep costs low by designing the keyboard's Braille keycaps himself and using 3D-printing as well as inexpensive materials to create them in bulk.

"We take the keyboard base first, that are often donated or discarded. Then, we design the keycaps ahead of time in Computer-Aided Design software so the Braille dots, spacing, and fit are consistent," he said.

By using 3D-printing, Sharma said his company is able to create their Braille keycaps by using a combination of PETG, a thermoplastic for toughness, and another rubber-like thermoplastic called TPU for a grippier feel, plus a resin for definition.

After assembling the keyboard by hand, Sharma said that he or one of over 50 student volunteers attaches each key individually using a strong adhesive, and tests each keyboard for clarity, durability, and comfort.

"We also iterate based on feedback, including from team members who are visually impaired, to improve comfort and usability," said Sharma.

By also developing a standardized method for building the keyboards, Sharma said helps ensure the device can be rebuilt using different keyboard models.

From an early age, Sharma said he always liked building and fixing things.

"When I was five years old, my first invention was a small holder to keep my dad from constantly losing his glasses, and that mindset stuck with me," he said.

This mentality drove Sharma to create his earliest Braille keyboard prototype and conduct numerous retests to improve its comfortability and durability.

He also visited a school for students who are blind and visually impaired in India, where he realized that, "accessibility is about daily reality, not a demo. It made me committed to building tools that don't just work once, but keep working in the real world."

A regular keyboard, Sharma explained, is designed primarily for sighted users who rely on printed letters.

"A Braille keyboard adds a tactile system so a user who is blind or visually impaired can locate keys confidently through touch and type more independently," he said.

There are different categories of Braille keyboards, like braille notetakers or refreshable braille display systems with complex moving parts that Sharma said can cost over \$6,000.

"What we build at Jdable is a practical, low-cost input solution, a familiar QWERTY layout made accessible through tactile Braille keycaps that support learning, schoolwork, and everyday computer use on a standard setup," said Sharma.

Today, Sharma and his team of student volunteers, have distributed over 100 affordable Braille keyboards through his nonprofit.

Sharma said those keyboards have been given to nearly 1,000 students who are blind or visual impaired in the U.S., India, Finland and the United Arab Emirates.

He said the nonprofit has been sustained by grants totaling \$490,000 from companies like Google and Microsoft, while also receiving around \$10,000 in donations from individual contributors.

Ankith Namireddy, 17, fellow Princeton Day School 12th grader, began helping Sharma in 2024 and manages the nonprofit's finances, which includes applying for grants and securing funding.

"I chose to help because I saw that the problem he was addressing was severely overlooked," said Namireddy, who plans to attend college and major in business/finance. "I believed we could genuinely make an impact on this community. I have always wanted to help people and being able to do that while still pursuing finance made everything align perfectly."

The funding, Sharma said, also covers the nonprofit's expenses ranging from the costs of materials to hosting user feedback sessions.

"It is the most rewarding project I have ever worked on. It isn't about creating a really cool invention but about independence, giving someone the ability to type ... and not have to wait for someone else to do it for you," Sharma said.

"I have learned that accessibility isn't just charity," he added, "but developing infrastructure for dignity."

Building Independence Together: Employment Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities in Louisiana

For many families across Louisiana, one of the biggest questions is: *What does the future look like for my loved one with a disability?* Employment is a key part of that answer. Meaningful work offers more than a paycheck—it builds confidence, independence, and a sense of purpose. The good news is that Louisiana continues to expand resources and opportunities to help individuals with disabilities succeed in the workforce.

When individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to work, the benefits extend beyond the individual to the entire family. Earning income and developing job skills increases independence, while being part of a team helps build confidence and self-esteem. Employment also creates stronger social connections and a greater sense of belonging. Many families share that these experiences bring a new level of pride and hope for the future.

Louisiana Supports

[Families Helping Families \(FHF\)](#) is a trusted, family-driven one-stop hub transforming the lives of individuals with any disabilities or special healthcare needs of all ages — empowering families through lived experience to navigate systems, access vital resources, and achieve lasting independence through one-on-one guidance, information, referral, peer support, education, training, and advocacy. FHF is a statewide network of nine independent nonprofit organizations that partner with local and state agencies to ensure families across Louisiana can find the help they need. Some of these partnerships include the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council, Louisiana Department of Health – Bureau of Family Health, Louisiana Department of Education, local Human Service Authorities, among others. Families Helping Families helps your loved one build independence by connecting them to job resources early—especially during the high school transition years—when it can make the biggest difference.

What This Means for Your Family

Families play an essential role in supporting this journey. Encouraging independence, exploring career interests early, and connecting with resources like FHF, LRS, and inclusive college programs can help create a strong foundation for success. Every step forward—no matter how small—is progress worth celebrating. It's important to remember that each employment journey is unique, and success looks different for everyone.

Looking Ahead with Hope

Employment is more than a goal—it's a pathway to independence, dignity, and belonging. With the right supports, individuals with disabilities in Louisiana can thrive at work and in their communities. And families don't have to navigate this path alone. Your local Families Helping Families center is ready to support you every step of the way—it's who we are. It's what we do.





Louisiana SUN Bucks provides families with a ONE-TIME payment of \$120 for each eligible school-aged child (5 to 18 years old) to buy groceries during the summer break.

Families should make sure their mailing address is correct on their child's Medicaid, FITAP, or KCSP case, and with their child's school. EBT cards will be sent to the mailing address that is on file. Email sunbucks@la.gov for help updating your mailing address.

Louisiana Special Education Parent Involvement Survey



Dear Families, your voice is more important than ever! The Louisiana Department of Education invites parents and caregivers of students with disabilities to participate in the Louisiana Special Education Parent Involvement Survey. This survey offers a chance to share your experiences, give feedback on your child's education, and contribute to enhancing special education services throughout our state.

Your insights will have a direct impact on how schools support families and students. We strongly encourage you to take a few moments to participate. Together, we can help create a more inclusive and effective educational system for all children.

[Take the Survey Here](#)

Creating a Go Bag or Stay Kit for Your Family



Emergencies can strike at any moment, and having a well-thought-out plan can significantly enhance your family's safety and peace of mind. Assembling a go bag or stay kit guarantees that you have vital supplies ready, whether you need to evacuate swiftly or remain in place. Each family has distinct needs, particularly when caring for a loved one with a disability or medical condition, so it's crucial to include items such as medications, important documents, contact lists, and comfort items.

- *Essential items to prepare in advance include:**
- Water
- Non-perishable food
- Hygiene products
- Clothing
- A first aid kit

By taking the time to gather and organize these supplies now, you can help alleviate stress and ensure your family's safety during unforeseen circumstances.

[*Learn More Here](#)**

Understanding Child Welfare Services in Louisiana

Families are essential in ensuring that children are safe, supported, and thriving throughout Louisiana. The Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) offers crucial child welfare services aimed at protecting children, enhancing family bonds, and connecting caregivers with necessary resources. Whether you are looking for support, guidance, or information on reporting concerns, DCFS provides tools to assist families in navigating challenging circumstances with empathy and understanding. By familiarizing themselves with these services, families can feel more empowered to advocate for their children, seek support early on, and foster safer, stronger communities for everyone.

[*Learn More Here](#)**

The Disability Assessment & Coordination Entity

What is DACE?

- We are here to help the disability community prepare for and recover from disasters.
- We are a bridge between emergency management and the disability community.



PREPARE

We provide emergency preparedness trainings, meetings, and outreach in all regions of the state.

Everything we do is to meet the unique needs of the disability community.



RECOVER

When disaster does strike, we meet survivors where they are — often in shelters or impacted areas — to help with recovery by connecting them to resources and support.

Who should be involved?

People with disabilities and their families, organizations who support the disability community, local government, and emergency management professionals.

Why is this important?

People with disabilities are 2-4 times more likely to be seriously hurt or lose their lives in disasters.

Many face barriers to evacuation, shelter access, communication, and medical care.

We help ensure *no one* gets left behind.



HELPLINE:

337.331.2534



EMAIL:

info@disability-access-solutions.com



WEBSITE:

disability-access-solutions.com





Newk's 2026 Summer Camp Guide

Welcome to the Newk's 2024 Summer Camp Guide. Summer camp can be beneficial for all children by keeping them moving through playtime activities, encouraging critical thinking and decision-making skills as they become more independent, how to work as a team, and make new friends.

[Read More](#)

2026 Summer Fun Digital Magazine



[Summer Digital Magazine](#)



Summer Camps

MedCamps of Louisiana holds a series of one-week, fun-filled camps each summer free of charge for children in Louisiana facing the challenges of a variety of physical and mental disabilities. These include spina bifida and orthopedic conditions, cerebral palsy, asthma, sickle cell anemia, autism, epilepsy, visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech impairment and those developmentally disabled.

Children battling these disorders are often unable to participate in normal childhood activities. Consequently, they are often “left out” because they have special needs. With MedCamps that is no longer the case.

Every week during the summer a different camp is held. Each camp is designed specifically for a particular type of disability – and that includes appropriate health professionals, specially trained staff and tailored activities. (Prior to camp, each parent or guardian is responsible for providing the camp office with the details of the camper’s medical management program as prescribed by the camper’s physician.)

The focus is on what campers can do, and all campers are encouraged to reach their full potential. In the safe environment of MedCamps, surrounded by other children with similar challenges, these special campers discover they are not alone and gain a genuine sense of belonging, accomplishment and self-worth.

[Click here for Summer Camps List](#)



MAY 2026 TRAININGS

Come learn, connect, and grow with us through engaging I/DD and disability trainings built to strengthen the support you give every day.

6 • 10 AM

MASTERING THE IEP PROCESS: KEY TIPS AT EVERY STAGE

Zoom Link: <https://tinyurl.com/vvssu96s>

14 • 11 AM

SECTION 504: WHAT FAMILIES NEED TO KNOW

Zoom Link: <https://tinyurl.com/uj266bfn>

18 • 11 AM

HELPING CHILDREN THRIVE BEFORE KINDERGARTEN - EARLY SERVICES

Zoom Link: <https://tinyurl.com/yev9z97v>

21 • 12PM

BULLYING: PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER WITH MR. RASHAD BRISTO

Zoom Link: <https://tinyurl.com/2n2wst9a>

28 • 9AM

PROTECTING STUDENTS: ANTI-DISCRIMINATION IN SPED

Zoom Link: <https://tinyurl.com/exheyzud>

SAVE THE DATE!

For More Information: please call 318-361-0487.

TRAINING DESCRIPTIONS:

MASTERING THE IEP PROCESS: KEY STEPS AT EVERY STAGE - June 6, 10AM

This session is a practical guide on the essential steps of the IEP journey, highlighting what to do before, during, and after the meeting to support strong outcomes for students with disabilities.

SECTION 504: WHAT FAMILIES NEED TO KNOW - JUNE 14, 11AM

This session will help provide parents/caregivers and stakeholders with an understanding of the distinct purposes, processes, and implications of Section 504 in supporting students with disabilities in the educational setting.

HELPING CHILDREN THRIVE BEFORE KINDERGARTEN - EARLY SERVICES - JUNE 18, 11AM

This session gives families a simple overview of the early services available to support children with developmental delays before they enter kindergarten, including early intervention, preschool special education, and community-based programs.

BULLYING: PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER - JUNE 21, 12PM

Led by local, published author and disability advocate, Rashad Bristo, this session will be a powerful conversation on:

- The real impact of bullying
- Healing and awareness
- Practical tools for families and communities

PROTECTING STUDENTS: ANTI-DISCRIMINATION IN SPED - JUNE 28, 9AM

This session will be a brief overview of the protections that prevent discrimination in special education, including access, accommodations, bullying and harassment safeguards, and what families can do when concerns arise.



JUNE 2026 TRAININGS

Come learn, connect, and grow with us through engaging I/DD and disability trainings built to strengthen the support you give every day.

2 • 10 AM

NAVIGATING THE IEP: THE ROAD MAP

Zoom Link: <https://tinyurl.com/vyb676mk>

10 • 8 PM

STEP INTO ADVOCACY: SKILLS TO LEAD AND INFLUENCE -

Zoom Link: <https://tinyurl.com/5xcy6xrz>

16 • 11 AM

SECTION 504: WHAT FAMILIES NEED TO KNOW

Zoom Link: <https://tinyurl.com/55dubrca>

22 • 1 PM

ADDRESSING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR THROUGH THE IEP

Zoom Link: <https://tinyurl.com/3prvrchu>

30 • 9 AM

DONT GET LOST IN THE MAZE: HOME & COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES

Zoom Link: <https://tinyurl.com/yvfpy3tc>

SAVE THE DATE!

For More Information: please call 318-361-0487.

TRAINING DESCRIPTIONS:

NAVIGATING THE IEP: THE ROADMAP - JUNE 2, 10AM

Understanding the world of special education and the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is key to ensuring your child receives the support they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. This session is to empower parents with the knowledge and tools needed to navigate the IEP process confidently.

STEP INTO ADVOCACY: SKILLS TO LEAD AND INFLUENCE - JUNE 10, 8PM

A beginner-friendly session is to help you build the confidence and skills needed to advocate effectively and make a meaningful impact in the world of disability services.

SECTION 504: WHAT FAMILIES NEED TO KNOW - JUNE 21, 1PM

This session will help provide parents/caregivers and stakeholders with an understanding of the distinct purposes, processes, and implications of Section 504 in supporting students with disabilities in the educational setting.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR THROUGH THE IEP- June 22, 1PM

The IEP Team has an important role in addressing the behavioral needs of students with disabilities when developing the IEP. We will introduce how functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans are a useful framework to support students with disabilities.

DONT GET LOST IN THE MAZE: HOME & COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES - June 30, 9A

This session will be a brief overview of the network of person-centered services available for individuals with disabilities and their families across the lifespan,

Strengthening Adolescent Well Care: Integrating Youth Health Transition and Mental Health Screening into Practice



SAVE THE DATE!



**Wednesday
June 3rd 2026**



**10 AM - 12:30
PM**



<https://tinyurl.com/R58RIW2026>



People First
of Louisiana



2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

JUNE 18, 2026 | 10AM-2PM

HOMWOOD SUITES
201 KALISTE SALOOM RD,
LAFAYETTE, LA 70508

**MEET THE UNSTOPPABLE
TRACY SCHMITT!**

CLICK QR CODE TO REGISTER



Tracy Schmitt—known around the world as “Unstoppable Tracy”—is a powerful, high-energy speaker who was born a 4-way amputee and has never let anything stop her. She brings inspiration, real-world leadership skills, and unstoppable confidence to people of all abilities.

2nd Annual Disability Awareness Day at the Capitol

The [Split Second Foundation](#) and the Governor's Advisory Council on Disability Affairs will co-host the annual Disability Awareness Day at the Louisiana State Capitol.

This event will enable disability based organizations to meet and interact with legislators, the Governor's Advisory Council on Disability Affairs, and state leaders during the 2026 Regular Session to emphasize the importance of their work in their communities.

This year's Disability Awareness Day will feature a high-level fireside chat titled "From Lived Experience to Lasting Policy," featuring Louisiana Department of Health Secretary Bruce Greenstein and moderated by Mark Raymond, Jr., Founder and CEO of the Split Second Foundation.

The event will also feature exhibitors from various organizations who are pivotal in providing services and support within the disability community.

Join us and lend your voice to advocate for policies that empower this vibrant community.



9th Annual



**Presented By
Families Helping Families Of NELA**

**SAVE THE
DATE**



**Saturday,
October 17, 2026**

Touch-A-Truck & Trick or Treat

**Come Explore & Climb on a
variety of firetrucks, police
cars, construction trucks and
big rigs!**

**Wear your Halloween
costume & *Trick or Treat* at
each vehicle!**

**If you have a truck or piece of
equipment and would like to
participate or if you need additional
information regarding the event,
please call Families Helping Families,
318.361.0487 or email
sguidry@fhfnela.org.**

SAVE THE DATE: Saturday, October 17, 2026



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.