



One Voice Brevard



1 May 2025

Breaking the Silence:

Common Myths About Mental Health

by Guest Author Angelika Keene, UF/IFAS Extension

May is Mental Health Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness, promoting well-being, and breaking the stigma that still surrounds mental health. One of the biggest barriers to seeking help is the widespread misunderstanding of what mental health actually means. A common myth is that mental health only refers to mental illness, but the truth is, everyone has mental health, just like everyone has physical health. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being, and it affects how we think, feel, and act every day, not just during times of crisis.

This month also offers an important opportunity to challenge another damaging myth: that therapy or asking for help is a sign of weakness. In reality, seeking support is a powerful act of strength and self-awareness. Programs like Mental Health First Aid empower individuals to recognize signs of mental health or substance use challenges in others, offer reassurance, and connect them to appropriate care. These skills help build more compassionate, resilient communities. If you're ready to take action, consider registering for the upcoming Adult Mental Health First Aid course hosted by UF/IFAS Extension Brevard County on Thursday, May 29, 2025, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. To learn more and register, click the link below.

*<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/adult-mental-health-first-aid-training-tickets-1203588689169?aff=oddtcreator>



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RFK's Comments on Autism...

by Joseph Werner, OTD, OT/I, Director Brevard Autism Coalition

On Wednesday April 16th, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (RFK) attempted to address recent data from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) that the latest numbers on the incidence of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in America had changed from 1 in 36, 8-year-olds, to 1 in 31, 8-year-olds. Instead of shedding light or perspective on the situation, Secretary Kennedy muddied waters and fed into inaccurate speculation about the causes of ASD, and the functioning and well-being of people with autism.

First, it appears that Secretary Kennedy did not read the actual report from the CDC. The CDC report explicitly states that the difference in autism prevalence "can reflect differing practices in ASD evaluation and identification and availability and requirements that affect accessibility of services." Although there is much still to be learned about the causes of autism, spreading misleading or wrong-minded information, and leaning into stereotypes and stigma only causes harm and disrespect. What we know is that autism is not caused by one thing. Autism is a multifactorial diagnosis, with roots in genetics, neurobiology, and perhaps environmental factors. Individuals with autism have a wide range of abilities and challenges. We know that autism is not a disease, and decades of research have ruled out vaccinations as a causal agent. In addition, research has consistently failed to identify any environmental toxins that increase the risk of a child developing autism. The most likely causes for the increased rates of autism include improved awareness and screenings especially with underserved populations such as lower income families and families living in rural areas, and widening diagnostic criteria. More adults and children over the age of 8-years old are also being diagnosed with autism.

The most infuriating comments came when Secretary Kennedy described autistic children. He said "And these are kids who will never pay taxes, never hold a job, they will never play baseball, they will never write a poem. They'll never go on a date." These comments are not only ignorant, but demonstrate a complete lack of understanding of people with neurodiversity. Secretary Kennedy either has never met people with autism (Elon Musk has stated that he has autism), or is looking at autism through a lens where he wants to drive a political narrative.

Having worked for over 40 years as an occupational therapist specializing in pediatrics, I have met hundreds of people with autism with amazing personalities, skills,



Opinion: RFK's Comments on Autism (cont.)

hopes and dreams. People with autism have jobs, and pay taxes, and in fact there is a critical need to develop more job opportunities for people with autism. People with autism often have legitimate daily challenges, but they seek out friendships, have romances, play baseball, run marathons, marry, write books and poems and have the hopes and dreams just like anyone else. Somewhere around 25% or more of people with autism have intellectual disabilities and need consistent support for their medical and personal care, but that also does not mean that they are not valuable and important members of their community. If anything, there is a growing change in thinking about autism and neurodiversity where the focus is not on "fixing" autism, but recognizing that autism is part of a neurodiversity that exists across humankind. Intervention then becomes how do we best support children, teenagers and adults with autism, and their families, to facilitate functioning, well-being and health. Early intervention services and early diagnosis remain essential, and we need to increase services especially to young adults and older adults who need help with housing, employment, transportation and social opportunities.

The CDC report concludes, "increased identification of autism, particularly among very young children and previously under-identified groups, underscores the increased demand and ongoing need for enhanced planning to provide equitable diagnostic, treatment and support services for all children with ASD."

The message is clear; it is unfortunate that the United States Secretary of Health and Human Services whose job it is to protect the health of all Americans and provide essential health services, is so out of touch and blinded by his own biases. Secretary Kennedy's recent comments on autism, when considered together with his anti-vaccine biases, indicate that Americans can have no sense of trust or confidence in his ability to lead and provide health care for every person in this country, and may be placing the health and well-being people with autism and neurodiversity at risk.

Get SOAKed for Autism

by Mary Cancel, President

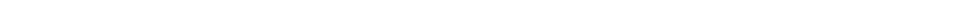


SOAK (Supporting Our ASD Kids Inc) held their 9th Annual Get SOAKed for Autism on Saturday, April 5th at Fred Poppe Park. This was an amazing inclusive free community event, with continued partnership and support from Palm Bay Parks and Recreation.

The new, fully compliant ADA playground at Ted Whitlock Community Center opened that morning with a ribbon cutting ceremony then Get SOAKed continued the celebration. Once again, Palm Bay Fire made a big splash with their water spray, and two fire trucks, misting several pools of water toys, the grassy area and laughing children.

Palm Bay Police were also on the scene providing free popsicles for all! The foam party, water slides, pools, toddler zone, inflatables and music sessions were all a huge hit! Families snacked on cotton candy popcorn and snow cones. They enjoyed wild animal interactions at the petting zoo, face painting, arts/crafts, free food bags, vendors, sponsors and an indoor sensory zone plus our wonderful cosplayers!

Thank everyone for participating helping us create this magical day for over 1,000 participants. See you next year!



Section 504 Update

by Nicole Grabner, Editor



On Friday, April 11th, I received a response to my inquiry from our Attorney General regarding the status of the federal case Texas v. Kennedy. (1)

This case was originally filed by 17 states, including Florida, in September of 2024 and called for the complete removal of 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and it's updated Rule.

The case originated with the state's complaint of the updated Rule from May of 2024 which includes protections of discrimination in medical treatment, community integration, accessibility of medical equipment, web and mobile app accessibility and protections against value assessment methods (this prohibits the use of any measure or assessment that discounts the value of a life extension on the basis of disability.) The center of the case rested with their disagreement with "gender dysphoria" being considered a federally protected disability.

The states have updated their request to no longer find the complete removal of 504; however, the case still calls for the removal of the final rule saying that it, "lacks the force and effect of law" and is not "enforceable." (2) This final rule updated federal protections that had not been considered since its first publication, over 50 years ago. So while it is encouraging to note that the states are no longer looking to completely abolish the original law of the Rehabilitation

Act of 1973, the updated final rule that is in dispute has crucial protections (like previously mentioned against medical discrimination) enjoyed by not just Intellectual and Developmental Disability (I/DD) persons, but also veterans, the elderly, etc. Basically any American citizen that is disabled.

So what happens next? The next status report is due 21 July and it is important that advocates and families continue to contact their state's Attorney General and their legislators reminding them that we need to protect our disabled citizens and ask that they drop their suit. You can use the following information to contact Florida State's Attorney General, James Uthmeier:

Mailing Address:
Florida Attorney General
The Capitol
Office of Attorney General
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0002

Phone Number:
(850) 717-9310
(850) 414-3990

Email:
attorney.general@myfloridalegal.com

Links for article:

1. <https://dredf.org/protect-504/#anchor2>
 2. <https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2025-06127.pdf>
 3. https://dredf.org/wpcontent/uploads/2025/04/2025.04.21_Update-on-Texas-v-Kennedy.pdf
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Angels Bridging Gaps Earth Day

by Jaqueline Yearby, Director Angels Bridging Gaps



Earth Day, celebrated annually on April 22, serves as a vital reminder of our shared responsibility to protect the planet. It highlights the urgent need to address environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. By raising awareness and encouraging collective action, Earth Day empowers individuals, communities, and governments to adopt more sustainable practices and policies.

The ABCworks Enrichment Program for Adults with Disabilities would like to thank the City of Satellite Beach for extending all of the support and effort in making our 2025 Earth Day Celebration & Beach Cleanup Day such a memorable day for our young adults and their caregivers. Everyone had a great time with the beach cleanup and we enjoyed learning so much about the sea turtles and of course touring the new Fire-Police-Public Works facility which was amazing. So on behalf of our ABCworks Village special thanks to you and your entire Satellite Beach Team for making us feel welcomed.

“ It Takes A Village Filled With Love •Hope •Faith •Joy - Each One Teach One”



Bill Buzz

By: Nicole Grabner, Director, One Voice
Brevard



Upcoming Legislative Events:

The 2025 Legislative Session was scheduled to end on Friday, May 2, 2025, however, at the time of writing this article, it looks like that will not be the case.

Below you will a list of I/DD and Disability-related bills that have made it to the Senate and House Floor. These are the bills that have the chance to make it to the Governor for either signature or veto. To find current information, please check either the Senate or the House website.

A few bills that didn't make it to the Floor this Session include:

- SB 756/HB 377 - Health Insurance for I/DD
- SB 1004/HB 1131 - Housing for I/DD
- SB 1006 - Cameras in Classrooms (the House companion of this Bill made it to the House Floor with full support)
- SB 460/HB 345 - Student Elopement
- SB 568/HB 413 - Swimming Safety

*Not a complete list.

Bills which made it to the Floor:

1. SB102/HB 127 - ESE Students
 2. SB 540/HB 447 - Disability History
 3. SB 1050/HB 1103 - APD
 4. SB 112/HB 591 - Children with I/DD
 5. SB 500/HB 711 - Spectrum Alert
 6. SB 106/HB 97 - Protection of Vulnerable Adults
 7. SB 1156/HB 1529 - Home Health Aide
 8. SB 1382/HB 859 - School Readiness Program (economically disadvantaged households)
 9. SB 1736/HB 1567 - Insulin by DSPs
 10. SB 168/HB 1207- Mental Health
 11. SB 110/HB 1427 - Rural Communities and Health Care
 12. SB 1102/HB 877 - School Readiness Program (early childhood children with disabilities)
 13. SB 7032/HB 1227 - Medicaid for Permanently Disabled
 14. SB 180/HB 1535 - Emergency Preparedness
 15. SB 1412/HB 1353 - Home Health Care Services
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ONE VOICE BREVARD 2025 LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM



ISSUE: HOUSING

With over 1,000 people moving to Florida a day, and rising costs of living, Brevard County struggles to keep up affordable and accessible housing options. We need more accessible and supported living options, including group homes.

- Create more accessible housing options
- Bring more group home options to Brevard County
- Allow tax exemption status to caregivers of disabled citizens

ISSUE: HEALTHCARE

An estimated 1.4 million people in the state of Florida lost vital healthcare coverage during the Medicaid Unwinding this past year. Healthcare access in Brevard County is a struggle for many citizens, but especially for those who require specialized care. In addition, many citizens are on the waitlist for crucial home and community-based care. Having home-based care allows our most vulnerable population the option of avoiding institutions.

- Fully fund the APD (Agency for Persons With Disabilities) Wait List
- Bring more specialized doctors to Brevard County
- Support efforts to broaden medical coverage for our already overburdened disabled population

ISSUE: EDUCATION

Brevard County has over 18,500 students enrolled in the ESE program. With the rising amount of children diagnosed with intellectual and developmental disabilities, we need better support and specialized educators to work with our children to ensure they are prepared to live their fullest life upon graduation. Each year, these students leave the school system with no real outside support for secondary education or employment.

- Create more adult programs to support our disabled students
- Ensure IEP and 504 supports are being met with each student
- Ensure special education teachers receive adequate training to work with I/DD students



AT A GLANCE

OVERVIEW:

- Homeowner Program for caregivers
- Fund the waitlist for APD
- VR rate increase and programs
- Transportation Program/Uber Access
- Adult Day Programs and Employment
- Supported housing options



ONEVOICE BREVARD

Disability Advocacy in Brevard County

One Voice Brevard is the Coalition of Advocacy efforts for our disabled population in Brevard County. Our goal is to bring every advocacy group together to speak with one legislative voice.

A LIFELINE FOR **MEDICAID** FLORIDIANS



Medicaid is a joint federal and state program that provides health insurance and access to long-term care to more than 3,901,821 Floridians, including:

Around 29% of Floridians with disabilities under the age of 65	Around 40% of Floridian children	More than 238,000 adults receiving long-term supports and services
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What Medicaid Means for Floridians

- **Dignity and Community:** Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS) enable 177,207 disabled Floridians to live, work, and participate in their communities.
- **Federal Investment:** The federal government spent \$22.3 billion on Medicaid in Florida in 2023—providing around 65% of the total cost of the program in the state.
- **Jobs:** Medicaid creates thousands of valuable local jobs in the health care sector and increases employment for people with disabilities.
- **Stronger Rural Hospitals:** Medicaid funding enables rural hospitals and other critical health care infrastructure to stay open and provide care to rural residents.
- 51.9% of children in small town and rural areas are covered by Medicaid.
- 14.5% of non-elderly adults living in small towns and rural areas are covered by Medicaid.

Impact to Florida's State Economy

- Cuts to federal Medicaid funding would shift costs onto Floridians, squeezing already-tight state, local, and family budgets.
- The state would be forced to make up for the loss in federal funds.
- Without adequate funding for HCBS, thousands of Floridians with disabilities would lose their independence and be forced into nursing homes or state-run institutions to survive.



66% of Florida votes oppose cuts to Medicaid funding

For more information, contact Kim Musheno at musheno@thearc.org.

2898 Mahan Drive Suite 1 • Tallahassee, FL 32308 • 850.921.0460 • www.arcflorida.org

Resources and Contact Information

- [Brevard Autism Coalition](https://brevardautismcoalition.com/); <https://brevardautismcoalition.com/>
- [Angels Bridging Gaps](https://angelsbridginggaps.org/); <https://angelsbridginggaps.org/>
- [The Parker Foundation](http://www.theparkerfoundation.com/); <http://www.theparkerfoundation.com/>
- [S.O.A.K.](https://www.soakautism.com/); <https://www.soakautism.com/>
- [Down Syndrome Association of Brevard](https://www.dsabrevard.org/); <https://www.dsabrevard.org/>
- [UCF CARD](https://ucf-card.org/); <https://ucf-card.org/>
- [Florida Developmental Disabilities Council](https://www.fddc.org/); <https://www.fddc.org/>
- [Project 10](http://project10.info/); <http://project10.info/>
- [Vocational Rehabilitation](https://www.rehabworks.org/contact/area3.html); <https://www.rehabworks.org/contact/area3.html>
- [FLAPSE](https://apse.org/chapter/florida/); <https://apse.org/chapter/florida/>
- [The Arc of Space Coast](https://www.arcofsc.org/); <https://www.arcofsc.org/>
- [Promise in Brevard](https://promiseinbrevard.com/); <https://promiseinbrevard.com/>
- [Brevard Resource Center for Disability Solutions](https://rcdsfl.org/); <https://rcdsfl.org/>
- [The Family Cafe](https://familycafe.net); <https://familycafe.net>
- [Family Liason Project](https://familyliasonproject.com); <https://familyliasonproject.com>
- [Early Steps Space Coast](https://spacecoastes.org); <https://spacecoastes.org>
- [Family Care Council Area 7](https://fccflorida.org/area-7-fcc.html); <https://fccflorida.org/area-7-fcc.html>

For Newsletter Questions or Submissions:
info@ovcfl.org





May Events

Mental Health Awareness Month

MAY							2025				
S	M	T	W	T	F	S					
							1	2	3		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10					
11	12	13	14	15	16	17					
18	19	20	21	22	23	24					
25	26	27	28	29	30	31					

- Hey Mama! Mother's Day Edition, Saturday, May 3rd, from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Kiwi Racquet and Fitness Club, Banquet Room, 30 Tradewinds Dr, Indian Harbor Beach. Register via EventBrite. See flyer for details.
- Brevard Education Choice Fair 2025, Saturday, May 3rd, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., 2300 Judge Fran Jamieson Way, Melbourne, Fl. For more information, see flyer.
- Join The Arc of Florida for their Advocacy Meeting, Wednesday, May 7th, at 12 noon. Zoom information: https://us06web.zoom.us/join/MN_uM8T4SB6jtekiwanvXw.
- 2025 Summit Florida Voices for Health, Wednesday and Thursday, May 7th and 8th, "Hope and Healing in Our Fragmented Democracy, Lake Mary Events Center, 260 N. Country Club Rd, Lake Maru, Fl. For more information: WWW.FVHSUMMIT.ORG
- Rummage Sale, Saturday, May 10th, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., Melbourne Auditorium on Hibiscus Road, Free Admission. Angels Bridging Gaps will have a spring clearance on clothing!
- Mother-Son Date Night, Saturday, May 10th, from 5-8 p.m., sponsored by Angels Bridging Gaps. Cost \$25 for mother/son couple. At Knights of Columbus, 6725 Babcock St., Palm Bay - Malabar. For information or to register, abgworks1@gmail.com
- Disability Resource Fair, Sunday, May 17th, City Church Palm Bay. For more information, contact Angels Bridging Gaps as abgworks1@gmail.com
- Sensory Sensitive Play, The Aristocats Kids, by Stars of Tomorrow Youth Performing Arts Group, Saturday, May 31st, 2:00 p.m., Cocoa Village Playhouse
- Camp 2 Can, June Events, first camp beginning June 2nd through June 27th. Camps run weekly through June until July 14th. See registration flyer for more info or contact Brevard Autism Coalition at BrevardAutismCoalition@gmail.com



Event Flyers



COMMUNITY PLAY DATE
Under 5's

EVERY 4TH WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH
From 9:00am - 10:30am
The Children's Center
5650 S. Washington Ave.,
Titusville 32780
RSVP to Mary: 321-292-1370
SPACES ARE LIMITED!

THE CHILDREN'S CENTER
early steps

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING

May 29, 2025 | 9 AM - 4 PM

MHFA is skills-based training that teaches people how to identify, understand and respond to signs and symptoms of a mental health or substance use challenge.

This Course includes 2 hours of self-paced online pre-work & an in-person session.

Registration starts at \$65

Learn how to:

- Recognize common signs and symptoms of mental health challenges.
- Recognize common signs and symptoms of substance use challenges.
- Understand how to interact with a person in crisis.
- Know how to connect a person with help.

Register: <https://loom.ly/OyRdfou>



For more info, contact:
Angelika Keene
Angelika.Keene@ufl.edu

UF IFAS Extension
Everglades

The University of Florida is committed to providing universal access to all of our events. For disability accommodations such as sign language interpreters and listening devices, please contact the UF/IFAS Sevier County Extension Office at keene@ifas.ufl.edu or (352) 633-2702 at least 2 weeks in advance. Advance notice is necessary to arrange for some accessibility needs.

2025 Bookclub Books

January EXPLOSIVE CHILD	February Scaffold Parenting	March Sitting Pretty	April THE SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS
May THE SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS	June THE SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS	July EMPIRE GRASSHOPPER THINKING IN PICTURES	August LEADERS
October THE SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS	November THE SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS	September and December are off months.	

Bookclub meets on the last Monday of the month at 7:00 PM on Zoom. See One Voice Brevard Facebook page for Zoom link and event pages for more information.

Autism Coalition
Center for Autism and Related Disabilities
Supporting Our ASD Kids



Hey Mama!

Man's Retreat for those raising children with autism and special needs. Mother's Day Edition!

9:00am - 11:30am
May 2nd, 2025
Location: Kiwi Racquet and Fitness Club
Banquet Room - 2nd Floor
30 Poplarville Drive - Indian Mound, FL 32137

Coffee, light refreshments, self-care kit and takeaways, swag, and connection with shared needs for a day of relaxation and rejuvenation. *Dishes not provided

FREE REGISTRATION VIA EVENTBRITE
MUST REGISTER FOR EACH SESSION INDIVIDUALLY.
PLEASE CANCEL YOUR REGISTRATION IF UNABLE TO ATTEND AS SPOTS ARE LIMITED:

<https://heymamamay25.eventbrite.com>

CONNECTION, NETWORKING, SELF-CARE, AND DEEP DIVE BRAINTRAINING SESSION, GIVEAWAY FROM LOCAL WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESS

FOR INFORMATION EMAIL: info@theparkerfoundation.com

Hey Mama! Mother's Day Edition - Saturday, May 3rd, 2025
Time: 9:00 AM - 11:30 AM
Location: Kiwi Racquet and Fitness Club, IHB, FL (2nd Floor Banquet Room)
Description: Moms, this one's for YOU! Join us for the Hey Mama! Spring Edition retreat - a free event dedicated to mothers caring for children of all ages with autism and special needs. This retreat focuses on connection, networking, a deep dive to work on challenges in an open, non-judgmental environment and most importantly, self-care. Enjoy coffee, light refreshments, special takeaways, and a giveaway for one lucky mama!
Please note: Registration is limited, and there is no childcare available.
Register now via Eventbrite: <https://heymamamay25.eventbrite.com>

Event Flyers

ABGWORKS SUMMER HANGOUT 2025

SUMMER HANGOUT SCHEDULED EVENTS!
ALL FAMILY MEMBERS ARE INVITED TO ATTEND

\$25 PER SESSION EXCEPT FOR BOWLING CONTACT UNCLE PHIL 321-324-1643

- June 5th Mini Golf @ Andrettis (lunch)
- June 12th Bowling for BOWZ Bux (\$12/\$20)
- June 19th Surf Museum & RonJon's (lunch)
- June 26th Bowling for BOWZ Bux (\$12/\$20)
- July 3rd No hangout! Enjoy the 4th of July
- July 10th Amazing Glaze Pottery (lunch)
- July 17th Bowling for BOWZ Bux (\$12/\$20)
- July 24th Maritime Pirate Museum (lunch)
- July 31st Bowling for BOWZ Bux (\$12/\$20)

All times are from 11-2 except for bowling
Bowling noon, lunch option at the alley + \$8



FREE FAMILY EVENT
SATURDAY MAY 3, 2025 9AM -1PM

BREVARD COUNTY
**EDUCATION
CHOICE
FAIR 2025**

FREE PARKING | FREE SNACKS | DOOR PRIZES | PRE-K TO 12

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Scholarship Info
- Meet Learning Providers
- Workshops
- Fun Activities



Viera Regional Park
2300 Judge Fran Jamieson Way, Melbourne, FL 32940
SCHOOLCHOICEFAIR@GMAIL.COM

STARS OF TOMORROW Youth Performing Arts Group

Disney

THE ARISTOCATS KIDS

LIVE ONSTAGE




CAMP 2 CAN 2025

\$300 PER WEEK

Day camp for individuals with Autism and related conditions

Register for one or more weeks
**Before/After care not available

ACTIVITIES	EVENT DATES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building friendships • Learning and using social skills • Exploring nature • Sports and games • Learning various functional skills • Fieldtrips • Leisure activities • Arts and crafts 	<p style="text-align: center;">JUNE 2 - 27, 2025 (NO CAMP - JUNE 30 - JULY 4) JULY 7 - 18, 2025</p> <p style="text-align: center;">8:30 AM - 2:00 PM**</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>Child & Family Consultants, Inc.</small></p> <p style="text-align: center;">1800 PENN ST., SUITE 12 MELBOURNE, FL 32901</p>

BrevardAutismCoalition@gmail.com
www.brevardautismcoalition.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION

