



One Voice Brevard



1 January 2025

New Year, New Beginnings

"The beginning is the most important part of any work."
Plato

by Nicole Grabner, Director, One Voice Brevard



The end of the year is always a natural time of reflection. At the time of writing this article, we are drawing close to the end of 2024. At the beginning of the journey, we were a group of like-minded, but different organizations; all of us working in our own area. Over the course of the year, we hosted events together, collaborated, and drew together more. It is astonishing the path we have forged and proves all the amazing things we can accomplish when we come together as one community, as One Voice.

To that end, it is with great pleasure that I announce the launching of our new and collaborative organization called the, "One Voice Coalition." This coalition will unite the strengths, voices, and resources of the Brevard Autism Coalition, Angels Bridging Gaps, and One Voice Brevard to create a

community where individuals with disabilities and their families are empowered, supported and celebrated. We are committed to advocating for inclusion, accessibility, and equal opportunities across Brevard County and the state of Florida.

The One Voice Coalition seeks to promote collaborative advocacy and awareness through our monthly newsletter, training sessions, online resources and through direct engagement with local, state and federal legislators. Our mission statement is: "The One Voice Coalition unites the strengths, voices, and resources of the Brevard Autism Coalition, Angels Bridging Gaps, and One Voice Brevard to create a community where individuals with disabilities and their families are empowered, supported, and

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celebrated. We are committed to advocating for inclusion, accessibility, and equal opportunities across Brevard County and the state of Florida. Through collective action and collaboration, we strive to amplify one unified voice in advocating for policy change, breaking down barriers, and promoting the dignity and rights of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, ensuring they can thrive in every aspect of life.”

It is our hope to begin as we intend to continue, and the beginning of our year is going to be full of events in areas of advocacy, community and education. This year we want to focus on self-compassion, build supportive communities, and advocate for the resources and understanding we deserve. Together, we can make space that is inclusive and accessible for our community, cultivating an environment where all can flourish. Here's to a year of connection, empowerment, and endless possibilities!

The 2025 University of Central Florida CARD Conference



The University of Central Florida (UCF) will host its annual Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) Conference in January 2025. This highly anticipated event brings together professionals, researchers, educators, and families to share knowledge and insights on autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and related disabilities. The conference will feature a variety of workshops, keynote speakers, and networking opportunities to help participants stay current on the latest advancements in research, interventions, and best practices. Attendees will have access to expert presentations on topics ranging from early intervention strategies to supporting individuals with autism across the lifespan. With a focus on practical, evidence-based approaches, the event aims to foster collaboration and promote inclusive communities. The 2025 conference is expected to be an exciting and informative gathering that continues UCF's longstanding commitment to advancing autism support and advocacy. For more information as well as registration, please see the following link: <https://cardconference.info/>



Special Olympics Brevard Tennis



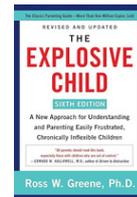
by Melissa Parker, President, Founder Parker Foundation

The Parker Foundation looks forward to kicking off 10 years of service to Brevard County families in 2025! To start in January, they will be assisting Special Olympics Brevard with Tennis which will be held at Kiwi Racquet and Fitness Club in Indian Harbor Beach on Saturdays. Coaches include Katie and Ruben Vanoppen; Katie has coached Special Olympics Tennis for 3 seasons prior to this year, and Ruben is a Tennis Pro at Kiwi and heavily involved in the Junior program. Melissa Parker and Parker Foundation Buddy Ambassador Sharanya Natarajan, 11th grade tennis player at Edgewood Jr./Sr. High School will be assisting in addition to volunteers from Amego, Inc. in Melbourne. Coaches and volunteers were recently trained and certified through Love Serving Autism, a non-profit out of South Florida that empowers individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities through racquet sports. The season will run from January to May with opportunities for athletes over age 9 to compete on their own level at local, regional and state tournaments.

The Parker Foundation will continue to have shorter, small group adaptive tennis clinics through their Speak Through Sports program year-round. It also looks forward to assisting athletes through Special Olympics to expand their potential and elevate their tennis experience.

The Parker Foundation hosts year-round, free sports, arts, education and safety programs in Brevard County, FL. Please follow us on Facebook and Instagram for program information and registration, and/or to be added to our email list for updates please email info@theparkerfoundation.com. Registration is closed for Special Olympics tennis this season, but please check out their website for upcoming sports and information: <https://www.specialolympicsflorida.org/central>

One Voice Bookclub Meeting



Join us in our new One Voice Bookclub meeting held on the last Monday of every month. Meetings will be held via Zoom, and our first meeting will be on January 27th at 7:00 p.m. The bookclub will feature a different book for each month which will announce in the Newsletter. For this month, we are reading "The Explosive Child" by Dr. Ross. We look forward to a lively discussion about the methods Dr Ross recommends when dealing with neurodiverse children.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81895596785?pwd=NSxbmDr4iQaZwdHFko0cplx3xaupP5.1>

Meeting ID: 818 9559 6785

Passcode: 125220

2024 - A Retrospective

by Nicole Grabner, Director, One Voice Brevard

As the year comes to a close, reflecting on the months gone by provides an opportunity to acknowledge both achievements and challenges, helping us to appreciate how far we've come. It's a time to recognize moments of growth, gratitude, and resilience, while also allowing space to learn from the difficulties faced. Taking time to reflect can foster a sense of closure and clarity, guiding us into the new year with intention and hope for what lies ahead.

Our disability coalition and advocacy efforts began as a conversation back at the beginning of the year. Multiple nonprofits came together with the amazing intent to speak collectively with one voice to help elevate our concerns.

The first true organized effort with this goal was our inaugural Disability Candidate Forum event, held in September this year. We invited candidates running for offices in Brevard County to come and speak specifically to our community and about our concerns. The event was so successful that we have scheduled a follow-up event in October of next year (2025), which will hopefully host our elected officials returning after the 2025 Legislative Session to discuss what changes we worked on and where we can continue to move forward.

The formation of our newsletter was another such effort to help not only continue to spread awareness, but also keep our community up to date about advocacy endeavors in our community and around the country. At the time of this letter's publication, we will have had three issues, and it is my hope that will continue all through the next year as well.

The beginning of 2025 is going to usher in many new and exciting changes. We will begin classes about advocacy, and engage efforts with our community to speak at events like the upcoming Brevard County Delegation Meeting, Legislative Days in Tallahassee, as well as various county meetings.

Our coalition is committed to continuing this effort by working more closely together than ever before. It is our hope that as we continue to grow our community, that we can help highlight our needs and concerns in a way that real change becomes possible.

Thank you to everyone for all your hard work this year! It's been an amazing one with so many wonderful changes! The end of the year is a good time to pause, reflect and consider everything that we want to continue with moving forward. I hope you all have a wonderful holiday! (And then it's back to work!)





Angels Bridging Gaps

by Phil DeFranco, Assistant Director

Angels Bridging Gaps is an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) & Other Disabilities caregiver support organization founded in Palm Bay, FL in 2008. On April 6th, 2021, we officially launched our adults with disabilities day program called “ABGworks Inc.” for the underserved population of young adults with disabilities age 18 and up.

2024 was a true test of will and dedication. Late in 2023, the church we had been using since 2008 had a change in the pulpit. We lost our space, which we had been using to give away clothing for free to those in need. This also coincided with the church doing away with the free food pantry.

2025 will be a fresh start for ABG & ABGworks as we join the “One Voice Coalition”. This will enable us and our fellow disability organizations to collaborate as one, ensuring that everyone succeeds. We are looking for a new facility to call home and to open a “Disability Resource Center”, where parents and caregivers can visit or call for information and guidance for that special person in their life. We anticipate staffing the facility a minimum of 5 days a week. Our goal is to be open by February of 2025. Eventually, we would hope to add additional “Disability Resource Centers” in Melbourne and West Melbourne.



Supporting Our Autistic Kids (SOAK)

by Mary Cancel, Director

Supporting Our ASD Kids, Inc. (SOAK) is looking forward to a busy year in 2025. In addition to our online support and resource group, we will continue to sponsor parent trainings in conjunction with CARD, to have our monthly breakfast meetups, and to table various community events whenever possible. We hope to initiate family playdates in the park and would like to recruit a group of SOAK Ambassadors who could represent us in the community when needed.

Mark your calendars for our annual Get SOAKed for Autism Family Fun Day on Saturday, April 5th, at Fred Poppe Park in Palm Bay! We can't wait to offer our community a day of water play and community engagement in a safe and accepting environment! We are also excited to participate in the Autism Resource Fair in August, as our goal has always been to provide resources to empower families and to educate members of the community in order to embrace our Autistic population. And then in November/December, we will once again partner with Early Steps on the annual Angel Tree project, providing holiday cheer for local special needs families.

We are currently in the process of creating a live database that our community businesses and partners will be able to update themselves to provide relevant resources for families, coming soon!

Look to our website and Facebook page for more information and for new events that may arise.

2024 Year In Review, Brevard Autism Coalition

by Joeseeph Werner, OTD, OT/L, Director



As 2024 comes to a close, the Brevard Autism Coalition (BAC) extends heartfelt gratitude to the Brevard community for its unwavering support throughout the year. Together, we have achieved incredible milestones, strengthening our shared mission to support individuals with autism and their families.

The year began with the 16th Annual Brevard Autism Coalition 5K Run/Walk for Autism Awareness and the sixth Run for the Kids Race Challenge. These events united our community in the spirit of fitness and fun, creating memories while advancing our cause.

Shortly after, we hosted a free seminar at the Space Coast Health Foundation titled “Empowering Relationships: Communication, Sexuality, and Behavior,” aimed at empowering young adults and their families with vital knowledge and tools.

In the spring, our Adventure Coffee Prevocational Camp provided 12 young adults with the opportunity to develop work skills by running the Adventure Coffee Café at Child and Family Consultants.

Building on this momentum, BAC partnered with the Cocoa Village Playhouse in May for another successful Sensory Sensitive Play. This beloved event has grown so much that two performances are planned for 2025, scheduled for late May and early June.

Thanks to generous funding, donations, and community grants, the Camp-2-Can Summer Program flourished under the leadership of Camp Director Heather Morway and an exceptional team of

counselors. Over six weeks, 80 participants (24 participants per week) with autism and related conditions experienced a safe, social, and fun-filled camp environment. Additionally, BAC maintained its year-round initiatives, including social skills groups for adolescents and young adults and a monthly golf program led by Coach Mike at the US 1 Golf Center in Rockledge. In September, BAC furthered its commitment to advocacy and collaboration by hosting a Candidates Forum at the Space Coast Health Foundation. This forum brought together local and state office candidates to engage with the disability community, sparking vital conversations about support and resources for individuals and families with disabilities in Brevard County. We were also proud to support the launch of One Voice Brevard, which aims to unite various disability nonprofit organizations in Brevard County, working together to educate, empower, and advocate for the voices of individuals with disabilities at both the county and state levels. One Voice Brevard started publishing a monthly newsletter—edited by Nicole Grabner and Brenda Leon—to educate and engage the community on important issues. November marked the return of the 11th Annual Brevard Uncorked Gala at the Hotel Melby in Downtown Melbourne. It was a memorable evening of entertainment, auctions, games, and fine dining, all in support of BAC’s mission.



One Voice Brevards Interns

We are super proud to introduce to you our very own One Voice Brevard Interns! Over the next three months, they will be working with the newsletter branch of our organization. At the end of this time a professional portfolio of print and photojournalism will be provided which they can take to their next experience.

They will be required to attend a once monthly planning meeting and submit articles/photos. It is our hope that they enjoy this experience and add to their professional portfolio.



Ken Friedel

Greetings, One Voice Brevard readers! My name is Ken Friedel, and I am one of two interns who will be working with One Voice Coalition over the next few months. I am interested in writing for the newsletter because I have had many years of experience with writing various reviews for film and television on top of doing annual "end of year" retrospectives as part of the content I do for my YouTube and Facebook pages.

But when I'm not writing up new blogs online, you can find me bowling with Angels Bridging Gaps or helping the Knights Of Columbus. Also, anyone that knows me well knows I am a fan of trains and especially Thomas The Tank Engine of which I've had the honor of being one of the featured interviews for a recent fan-made documentary on the fandom and even got to meet the two creators of the original show at the film's premiere.

What I am hoping to learn the most about writing from doing this internship is how to be original in my writings and giving credit where credit is due. This is something that I've always had a problem with, even from my days in school when it came to writing papers for my classes. I hope that this internship can help me to improve my writing abilities in these areas in order to make my writings as original as they've ever been before as I complete this internship in my path towards potential employment. Can't wait to get started on this internship, and I appreciate your support on this journey!



One Voice Brevards Interns

Through this internship, I hope to improve my writing skills, embrace new challenges, and learn how to create compelling narratives that resonate with readers. I look forward to contributing my unique perspective and growing as an intern alongside this fantastic team!



Hello, my name is Dalton Higbee, and I'm excited to be part of this internship program! I'm interested in writing because it has always been a passion of mine. I've spent the past few years building skills in communication and organization through various roles, including training programs and occupational therapy sessions. These experiences have taught me the importance of expressing thoughts clearly and connecting with others effectively.

When I'm not writing, my personal hobbies that I'm interested in are playing on the computer, looking up researching fun facts, playing with my dogs, playing outside, watching television, and spending time at places with my friends from Angels Bridging Gaps, including bowling, music, taekwondo, yoga, line dancing, and arts.



Bill Buzz

By: Nicole Grabner, Director, One Voice
Brevard



Upcoming Legislative Events:

We now have the official registration link for the Brevard County Delegation Meeting happening on 29 January at 5:30 PM at the Cocoa City Hall.

From Representative Sirois' office:

"The first segment will begin at 3:30 p.m. with remarks from registered speakers representing local governments, boards, and special districts. The second segment will begin at 5:30 p.m. and include local bill proposals and remarks by registered speakers who appear as members of the public or represent civic organizations.

Those interested in speaking to the delegation must complete and submit an Appearance Request Form. All completed Appearance Request Forms are due no later than 5 p.m. on Wednesday, January 22, 2025. All public and media inquiries may be directed to State Representative Tyler Sirois' Merritt Island District Office at 321-449-5111.

The 2025 Legislative Session begins on Tuesday, March 4, 2025."

This meeting is an important opportunity to meet with our legislators locally and advocate for our community. Please make sure that you register to speak and attend!

The link to register for public comment is:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/IFA1pQLSfb0enECMnOhbi33YGdC2prLepxny7x9!BhiEZaf7ULxzkXVQ/viewform>



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.



Monthly Art Submission



This month's art submission is a beautiful watercolor by 24-year-old Noah Jackson. You can see more of Noah's amazing artwork on Facebook under "Noah Jackson, An Artist with Autism."

Resources and Contact Information

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

For Newsletter Questions or Submissions:
info@ovcfl.org





January Events

JANUARY							2025								
				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										

- Every Saturday, beginning on **January 4th** through the end of **May**, Kiwi Racquet and Fitness Club in Indian Harbor Beach, FL hosts Special Olympics Brevard Tennis. To register: <https://www.specialolympicsflorida.org/area6-sports-registration>. See flyer for more information.
- **January 6th through the 10th**: Advocacy 101, Training for Adults and Caregivers offered in partnership with the Down Syndrome Association of Brevard. The class will be offered in person and on Zoom
- Saturday, **January 11th**, Starts of the Spectrum Concert, "By Autism, For Autism", *Howl at the Moon*, 8815 International Drive, Orlando. For more information see flyer.
- Delegation Meetings:
 - **Monday, 6 January**: Indian River County, 1801 27th St, Vero Beach, County Commission Chambers, 2:00 p.m.
 - **Tuesday, 7 January**: Volusia County, Deland
 - **Thursday, 9 January**: Orange County, Orlando
 - **Wednesday, 29 January**: Brevard County, Cocoa City Hall, Cocoa, 5:30 p.m.
- **Tuesday, January 21st**, 5:30 p.m., Brevard County School Board meeting, Viera
- **January 16 -19**, 32nd Annual Florida Statewide Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) Conference, the Florida Hotel & Conference Center, 1500 Sandlake Road, Orlando. Sessions 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Online registration ends January 15th. To register: <https://cardconference.info/>
- **Tuesday, January 21st**, Strategies for Applying for VR Services (FAU CARD), Zoom, 5 -6 p.m., Register at <https://ow.ly/znlW50UsYOw>.
- Every **Monday**, beginning **January 27th** through **March 17th**, 6 - 7 p.m., Barnyard Challenge, Youth Development Program, UF/IFAS Brevard County Extension Office, 3695 Lake Drive, Cocoa. Cost \$25.00.
- **Monday, k January 27th**, One Voice Brevard Disability Book Club. 7 p.m. on Zoom. January's book is "The Explosive Child, by Ross W. Greene, Ph.D. See flyer for Zoom info. Held the last Monday of each month.
- 29 -31 January, Florida Family Leaders Network Summit, Orlando.



ONE VOICE BREVARD
DISABILITY
BOOK CLUB

JANUARY BOOK:

THE EXPLOSIVE CHILD
HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD MANAGE AND HANDLE EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS
ROSE W. GREENE, Ph.D.

"KIDS WHO ARE HAVING DIFFICULTY ADAPTIVELY HANDLING PROBLEMS AND FRUSTRATIONS ARE LACKING THE SKILLS REQUIRED FOR BEING PROFICIENT IN HANDLING PROBLEMS AND FRUSTRATIONS" - THE EXPLOSIVE CHILD

27 JANUARY 2025, 7:00 PM ON ZOOM
MEETING ID: 818 9559 6785
PASSCODE: 125220

Special Olympics Brevard

TENNIS

Kiwi Racquet and Fitness Club
SATURDAYS 11AM
STARTING IN JANUARY 2025

Kiwi Racquet and Fitness Club will host 2025 Special Olympics Brevard Tennis January to May.

YAP (Young Athletes Program) ages 4 to 8 years old beginner/skills only, no competition.

Over 9 years old to adult opportunity to compete at area, regional and state on their own individual level.

No physical required to participate. YAP registration is limited; will have a waitlist if over the maximum number of registered participants. All equipment provided to registered athletes. Register through Special Olympics Brevard.

<https://www.specialolympicsflorida.org/registrarsportsregistration>

Kiwi Racquet and Fitness Club
30 Tradewinds Drive
Indian Harbor Beach, FL 32937

Free Entry!

In partnership with:

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!

EARLY STEPS PLAY GROUPS

Inclusive playgroup for all children with or without disabilities,
Ages 0 to 3
Join us for therapy related play activities
SEPTEMBER THROUGH DECEMBER 2024

Palm Bay Play Group - Every 3rd Friday of each month
9:30am - 10:30am
Palm Bay Library, 1520 Port Malabar Blvd. NE, Palm Bay, FL 32905

Cocoa Play Group - Every 1st Wednesday of each month **STARTS FEBRUARY**
10am - 11am
Catherine Schweinsberg Rood Central Library, 308 Forrest Ave, Cocoa, FL, 32922

Titusville Play Group - Every 2nd Friday of each month
9am - 10am
The Children's Center, 5650 S. Washington Ave., Titusville, FL 32780

TEXT 321-292-1370 (or call) to RSVP

FLUTIE 5K FOR AUTISM

25TH ANNIVERSARY

FEBRUARY 22, 2025 - SATELLITE BEACH, FL

WWW.FLUTIE5K.COM

Autism Coalition of Brevard

