



# One Voice Brevard



1 August 2025

## Service Dogs for Autistic Children

by Nicole Grabner, Director, One Voice Brevard

August 3-9 is recognized as International Assistance Dog Week. Working dogs can play a transformative role in the lives of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Specially trained service or therapy dogs can assist with tasks such as providing sensory support during moments of anxiety, improving physical coordination through guided activities, and encouraging emotional regulation through their calming presence. These dogs can help children develop routines, feel safer in unfamiliar environments, and even increase their willingness to engage in social interactions, particularly when verbal communication is difficult. Their consistent behavior and nonjudgmental companionship create a sense of trust that can be hard to achieve through human interaction alone.

For children with IDD, working dogs can also be a bridge to greater independence and improved quality of life. The bond between a child and a trained dog often encourages self-esteem and responsibility, as the child may participate in aspects of the dog's care. Moreover, working dogs can serve as social facilitators, reducing stigma and prompting more positive interactions with peers and adults. In fact one study from the National Institute of Health shows that having a service dog was associated with significantly better child sleep behaviors. Overall, the partnership between a child with IDD and a working dog offers meaningful emotional, physical, and social benefits.

For more information from a local provider, please see Space Coast Therapy Dogs. Another great provider (outside our county) is Topaz Assistance Dogs out of Naples, Florida.

In this newsletter you will find:

Service Dogs for Autistic Children

Disaster Preparedness for the I/DD Community

Getting Ready for a New School Year

Sensory Challenges Aren't Improving

Monthly Art Submission

Bill Buzz

Medicaid Primer

Resources

Events

Event Flyers

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# Disaster Preparedness for the I/DD Community

by Nicole Grabner

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Disaster preparedness for individuals with special needs in Florida is an essential, life-saving priority. With an average hurricane season spanning from June through November—and being central to climate-related challenges—Florida communities must take proactive steps to ensure safety, dignity, and inclusion for all residents.

First, developing a personalized emergency plan is critical. This should include contact information for caregivers, medical providers, and support networks. Individuals with special needs should identify accessible evacuation routes and safe shelters ahead of time, verifying whether local storm shelters offer ramps, hearing assistance systems, or designated quiet rooms. In Palm Bay and other parts of Florida, the city's emergency management department publishes annual lists of accessible shelters—families should confirm each year's updates.

Medical preparedness is another crucial component. Ensure an ample supply of prescription medications—ideally at least a two-week reserve—and a power source for any medical devices, such as oxygen concentrators, ventilators, or mobility aids that require electricity. Battery backups and manual alternatives (e.g., manual wheelchair options) can prove essential during storms and power outages.

Information accessibility is equally important. During emergencies, communication may be disrupted, so having access to multiple alert systems is crucial. (NOAA, social media, radio, etc) By crafting personalized plans, securing medical and power needs, ensuring communication accessibility, and building community ties, Florida's residents with special needs can face disaster events with greater resilience and confidence.

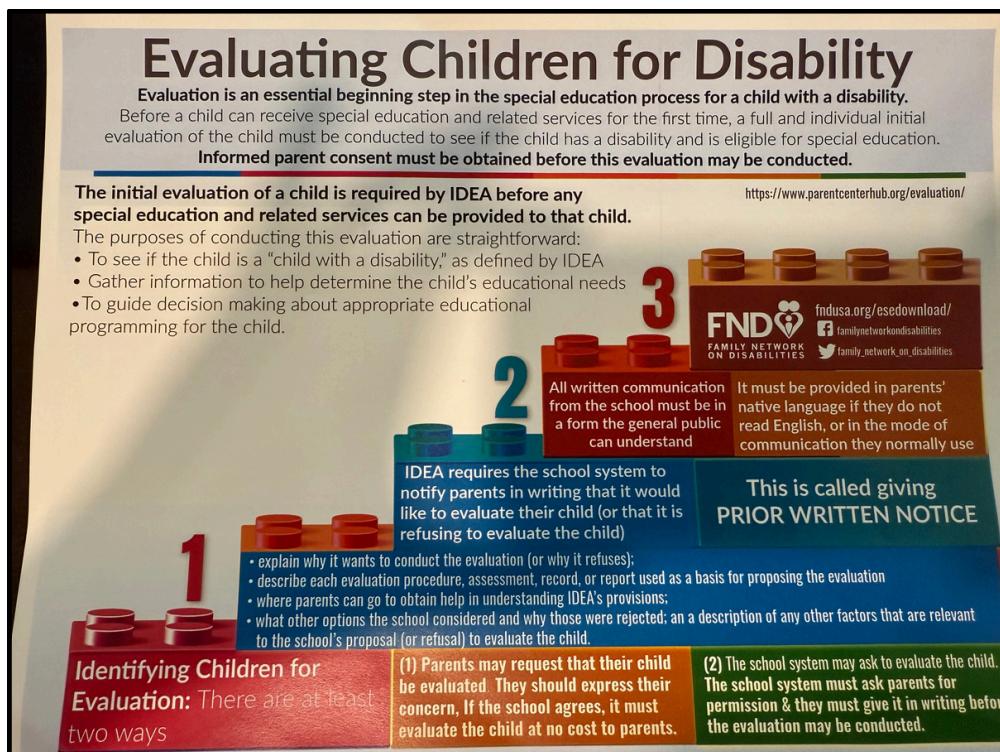
\*For more information on local shelters, please see the Department of Health Brevard County website. (<https://brevard.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/emergency-preparedness-and-response/special-needs-shelters/index.html>)

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# Getting Ready for a New School Year

School is set to begin on 11 August in Florida. Understanding the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process is crucial for families and educators involved in supporting students with disabilities in Florida public schools. The IEP serves as a legally binding document that outlines specific educational goals, services, and accommodations tailored to each student's unique needs. When parents and guardians are familiar with this process, they are better equipped to advocate for their child's rights and participate meaningfully in educational planning. This understanding also fosters collaboration among families, teachers, and support staff, ensuring everyone is working toward the same goal—student success.

In addition to supporting student outcomes, a solid grasp of the IEP process helps schools meet legal requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). By actively engaging in the IEP process, educators can create inclusive learning environments that reflect each student's strengths and challenges. Ultimately, understanding how IEPs work promotes equity in education, helping ensure all students—regardless of ability—receive the support they need to thrive academically and socially.



\*Image shared with permission from Florida FND. For more information, please see [www.fndusa.org](http://www.fndusa.org)

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# Sensory Challenges Aren't Improving -- and What You Can Do About it

by Danielle Halasz, MS, OTR/L  
(Reprinted with Permission)

You've tried the weighted blanket. The chewy necklace. The noise-canceling headphones. These tools seem to work temporarily, giving you hope – then, suddenly, you're back at square one again. You're left wondering: Why isn't it getting better?

If your child still melts down over clothing, avoids certain movements, or seems stuck in fight-or-flight mode, there may be something deeper going on – something that no strength of chewy necklace can fix.

## The Hidden Reason: Reflexes

When people hear the word “reflex,” they usually think of quick reaction times or the doctor tapping your knee at a checkup. But the kind of reflexes we’re talking about are more foundational – and often overlooked.

We’re talking about primitive reflexes – automatic movements that all babies are born with. These reflexes aren’t optional. They’re hardwired into the nervous system and critical for early survival, feeding, bonding, and movement. For example:

- The sucking reflex helps a newborn eat.
- The grasp reflex helps them hold onto a caregiver’s finger.
- The Moro reflex (the startle response) helps alert the caregiver to danger.

These reflexes are essential in infancy. But as the brain and nervous system mature, they’re supposed to fade away to make room for more complex movement patterns and emotional regulation. But here’s the kicker: sometimes, they don’t fade away.

When reflexes linger longer than they should – something we call retained reflexes – it’s like your child’s brain is stuck running on outdated software. And that “old programming” can show up in all kinds of surprising ways.

## What Do Retained Reflexes Have to Do With Sensory Issues?

Primitive reflexes actually help shape our sensory systems in infancy. When a baby moves reflexively – turning their head, flinging their arms, rooting for the breast – they’re also getting tons of sensory feedback: where their body is in space, how things feel, sound, and smell. When these reflexes don’t integrate, it can leave the sensory system in a state of disorganization.

Let’s go back to the Moro reflex. This reflex kicks in when a baby experiences a sudden movement or loud noise, triggering that classic flailing motion. This is helpful

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# Sensory Challenges Aren't Improving

*(Continued)*

for survival as an infant – but if the Moro reflex is retained, your child may continue reacting with extreme alarm to things like:

- Fire alarms
- Bright lights
- Sudden changes in routine

Even someone accidentally bumping into them at school. In other words: a child with a retained Moro reflex might live life in a near-constant state of fight-or-flight, which puts tremendous stress on their body, brain, and behavior.

## Signs Your Child Might Have Retained Reflexes

Depending on which reflexes are retained – and to what extent – your child might experience challenges in many areas of daily life. Common signs include:

- Trouble with balance, posture, or coordination
- Extreme reactions to textures, tags, or clothing
- Difficulty calming down or self-regulating emotions
- Meltdowns over small transitions or environmental changes
- Avoidance of playground equipment or active play
- Frequent fidgeting or trouble sitting still
- Delayed reading, writing, or fine motor skills
- Toe walking or unusual movement patterns
- Poor impulse control or attention difficulties

These behaviors are often misinterpreted as sensory processing disorder, ADHD, anxiety, or behavioral issues – and while those conditions may also be present, retained reflexes can underlie or exacerbate them.

## It's Not Just About Reflexes: The Whole-Child Approach

Here's where things get even more important: Retained reflexes rarely exist in isolation. That's why it's critical to find a provider who doesn't just check reflexes, but takes a holistic approach to understanding your child's development.

An effective evaluation should include:

- A thorough reflex integration assessment
- Sensory processing profile to evaluate how your child receives and responds to input
- Executive function screening to assess focus, working memory, emotional regulation, and flexible thinking
- Motor development analysis – including balance, strength, and core stability
- A developmental and family history intake, because context matters

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# Senory Challenges Aren't Improving

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It's not about chasing symptoms. It's about finding and treating the root causes behind the struggles – and that requires zooming out to see the whole picture.

## Okay... So What Can I Do?

You don't have to just "wait and see" or continue trying random sensory tools. Here's what actually helps:

### 1. Give Yourself (and Your Child) Some Grace

This is not your fault. Many behaviors that look like sensory issues, anxiety, or "bad behavior" are actually signs of reflexes doing a job they were never meant to keep doing. Your child isn't choosing to overreact or avoid certain sensations. Their brain is responding to a nervous system that still thinks it's in the newborn stage – and that's not something that can be reasoned with. Understanding this helps shift from frustration to compassion.

### 2. Work with a Reflex Integration Specialist

You need more than just general sensory strategies. Occupational therapists and physical therapists trained in reflex integration can assess which reflexes are still active and guide you through gentle, movement-based exercises that help the brain rewire itself. These activities are non-invasive, play-based, backed by neuroscience and most importantly: effective.

The earlier the intervention, the better – but it's never too late to integrate retained reflexes. We've seen kids of all ages (even teens!) experience break-throughs in sensory regulation, motor coordination, and emotional resilience once those reflexes were addressed.

### 3. Build a Regulation Toolbox

Retained reflexes place the body in a constant state of alert. To support integration, we also need to calm the nervous system and help the body feel safe.

Some favorite tools include:

- Rhythmic movements like swinging, bouncing, or tapping games
- Deep pressure input (squishes, bear hugs, or rolling with a therapy ball)
- Breath work and movement-based mindfulness
- Heavy work activities like animal walks, climbing, or carrying weighted objects

These tools don't just manage behavior – they help the brain rewire and form stronger connections between movement, sensation, and emotional control.

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# Senory Challenges Aren't Improving

*(Continued)*

## Final Thoughts: You're Not Alone – And There Is a Path Forward

If you've been trying all the sensory tools and nothing seems to stick, you're not alone – and you're not doing anything wrong. You're doing the best you can with the information you've been given. The problem is, most people don't know to look for retained reflexes – even many pediatricians and educators aren't trained to recognize the signs. But now you know. And that means you can start taking steps toward lasting change.

## Ready to Help Your Child Feel More Comfortable in Their Body?

All Together Wellness has a team of experienced therapists who are trained in retained reflex integration, sensory processing, and executive function support. They take a full-body, full-brain approach to your child's development – and will help you get to the root of the struggle. They believe kids thrive when their nervous systems feel safe, supported, and organized.

Contact All Together Wellness at 904-450-5061 to schedule a free phone consultation or book a comprehensive assessment. They also offer virtual services for families having a hard time finding a good fit for their child's needs nearby.

## School Days

T	M	O	L	L	R	F	I	Z	A	B	G	C
H	X	F	L	F	T	Y	C	B	L	D	F	S
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R	X	J	J	X	J	G	I	L	Y	O	I	A
A	P	P	Y	Z	K	Q	V	B	K	C	E	F
P	T	Y	B	O	O	K	S	V	R	A	N	N
Y	P	U	W	W	O	N	Y	K	P	B	T	U
T	V	A	Z	M	Z	L	L	M	L	E	S	R
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L	I	Y	J	D	I	A	G	N	O	S	I	D
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P	F	I	N	T	R	A	N	S	I	T	O	N

PAPER  
THERAPY  
DIAGNOSIS  
IEP  
ADVOCATE  
PENCIL  
BOOKS  
TRANSITION  
PLAN  
FRIENDS

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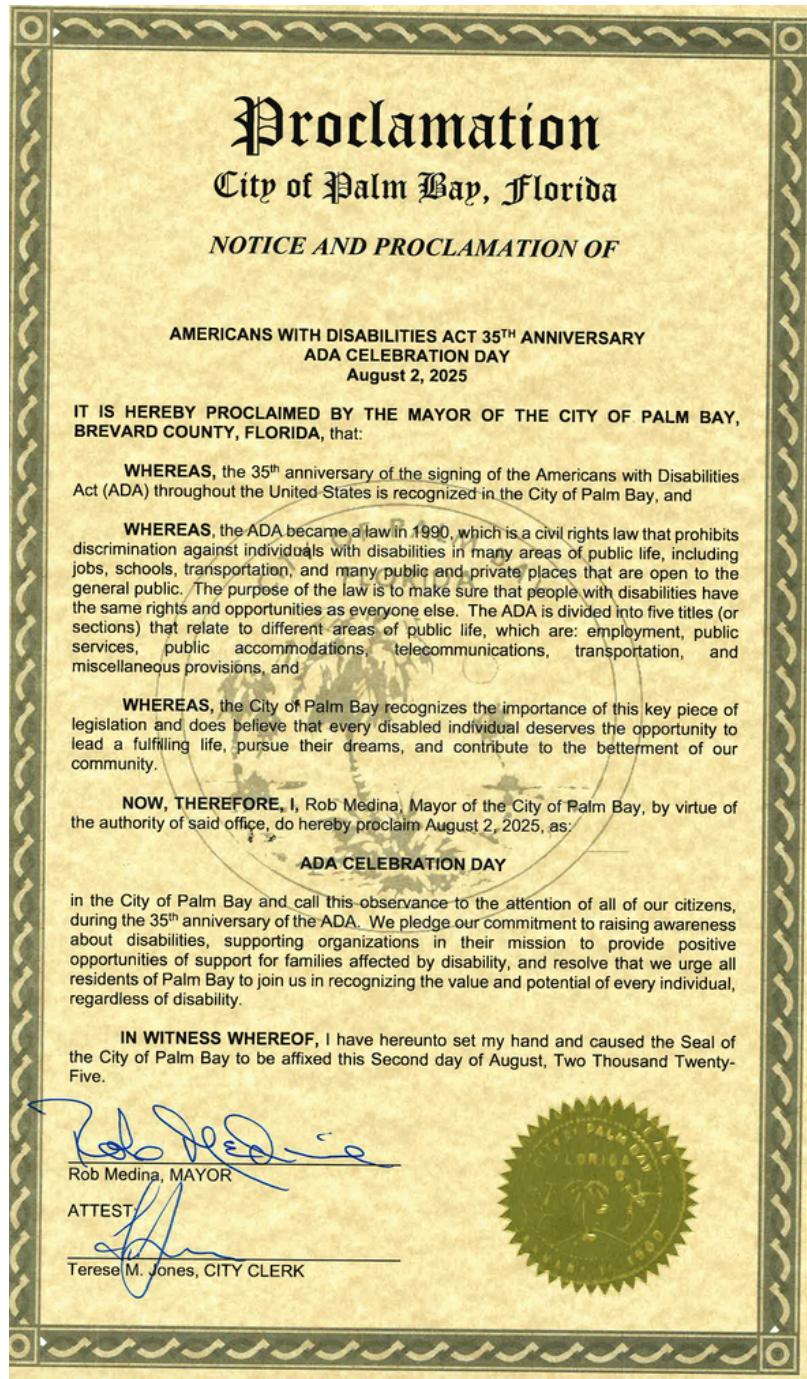
# The 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Proclamation

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# Monthly Art Submission

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This month's art submission was provided from a camper at Brevard Autism Coalition's Camp 2 Can. This is a character from "My Singing Monsters", a celestial monster called Pixie. It was outlined in pen and colored in marker and crayon.

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The 15-year old artists' name is Zoe Bell

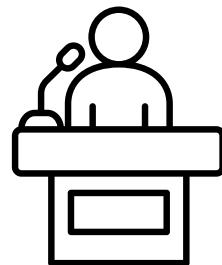
# Bill Buzz

By: Nicole Grabner, Director, One Voice Brevard

Just like that the summer is almost over and school is about to begin again. Dates for the upcoming 2026 Legislative Session have begun to be published and just like that....we are rolling into our next session of "advocacy."

In collaboration with our partner organizations, we are hoping to confirm at least ONE VOICE at every Florida county's upcoming delegation meetings - ONE VOICE to speak about our issues at this important meeting. Every year, each county hosts a delegation meeting, where state-level representatives gather to hear the concerns from their community. This important meeting is an opportunity for advocates to share their concerns ahead of the upcoming Legislative Session.

In fact, the next two months, before committee weeks get started and delegation meetings are held, are THE BEST TIME to meet with your



local representatives, while they are in district. They will have more time to speak with you before the crazy time of the holidays and committee meetings, so take advantage of the opportunity now; before the crazy busy time of year begins!

In that effort, if you would like to participate by committing to speak at your delegation meeting, would you please fill out this short survey (only four questions)? Let's fill this map with green! Let's make sure that OUR VOICE is heard!



\*Map as of 25 July.

# HOUSE BILL 1103 (2025)

**21K**

There are still over 21,000 people on the waitlist for services from APD.

## 01. Expansion of Pilot Program

Expand Pilot Program (2024) as a component of the Statewide Medicaid Managed Care Model using the contract from 1 February 2025 (MMC).

- Enrollment in the pilot program is OPTIONAL. (Opt-in)
- Be on the waitlist in Region D or I as of 1 October 2025
- Be on the waitlist in all Regions by 1 July 2026
- A needs assessment by APD is NOT REQUIRED for enrollment
- Establishes creation of call center to advise families about program

## 02. APD Transparency

1. Quarterly Reconciliation Reports on APD website
2. Must list by county and category number of those enrolled and those on the waitlist (updated every 5 days)
3. Allow for crisis enrollment with online application
4. Post annual reports from local and statewide Family Care Councils on agency website.

## 03. Family Care Council (FCC) Changes

1. Establishment of Statewide Family Care Council. This council shall:
  - a. review annual reports submitted by local councils
  - b. advise the agency on statewide policies
  - c. identify systemic barriers and recommend solutions
  - d. submit an annual report by 1 December to the Governor, Senate President, and House Speaker, and the agency
2. Staggered terms (2 or 4 years) local and statewide council
3. Local councils hold public forum every six months to solicit input

## 04. For more information

For more information, please scan QR code to read the signed Bill.





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 <b>29%</b> of Floridians with disabilities under the age of 65	Around <b>40%</b> of Floridian children	More than <b>238,000</b> 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](mailto:musheno@thearc.org).

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# Resources and Contact Information

- Brevard Autism Coalition; <https://brevardautismcoalition.com/>
- Angels Bridging Gaps; <https://angelsbridginggaps.org/>
- The Parker Foundation; <https://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; <https://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>
- Bright Feats magazine



For more information or questions, please see our Facebook page.

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# August Events

## International Assistance Dog Awareness

AUGUST 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						

- Friday, 1 August, 10:00 am to 11:30 am, Monthly Bruch Support Group for All Exceptional Needs of All Ages, Cracker Barrell Old County Store, 1175 Palm Bay Rd Ne, Melbourne. See flyer for more information.
- 2025 Helping Hands Disability Resource Conference provided by Angeles Bridging Gaps and One Voice Coalition Florida, Saturday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, from 11 am to 4 pm, at the Melborne Auditorium, Attendance is free. For more information, see flyer.
- Angels Bridging Gaps Fall Session Adult group, beginning Tuesday, 5 August, xxxxxx
- The ARC Advocacy Meeting, Wednesday, August 6<sup>th</sup>, at 12 noon. Training on the Four Seasons of Advocacy. On line meeting; register with the ARC of Florida. See Flyer.
- Early Steps Playgroups (Inclusive for Ages 0-3) (See flyer)
  - Wednesday, 6 August, 10 am to 11 am, Cocoa Library
  - Friday, 8 August, 9 am to 10 am., Titusville Children's Center
  - Friday, 15 August, 9:30 am to 10:30 am, Palm Bay Library
  - Monday, 18 August, 12:30 pm to 1:30 pm, My Gym Viera
  - Friday, 22 August, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm, Wee Warriors, Melbourne
  - Monday, 25 August, 9 am to 10 am, Play Space Canaveral
  - Wednesday, 27 August, 9 am to 10:30 am, Community Playgroup, Titusville Children's Center
- Adults with ASD Forum, Thursday, 7 August, from 3pm to 4pm and on Thursday, 28 August, from 7 pm to 8 pm on Zoom, Register at <https://ASDforum.eventbrite.com>. See flyer for details
- Health Without Borders, Saturday, August 16<sup>th</sup>, 10:30 am to 3:00 pm, 4446 Hollywood Blvd, West Melbourne. Free health event featuring health screenings, wellness resources and interactive activities for all ages. See flyer for more information
- Save the Date: The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Brevard Uncorked, Friday, 7 November, from 8pm to 10pm, The Grand Mano, 1450 Serno Rd, Melbourne



# Event Flyers



# Event Flyers

