



ISSUE #3

One Voice Brevard



1 December 2024

The Silent Struggles: Mental Health Challenges and Marital Strain Among Parents of Special Needs Children



by Heather Morway, Brevard Autism Coalition

Parenting is often described as the most challenging yet rewarding journey of life. However, for parents of special needs children, the challenges can become overwhelming, placing significant strain on their mental health and marriages. Research and anecdotal evidence alike point to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and marital discord among these parents, underscoring the profound difficulties they face.

The emotional toll of raising a special needs child often starts with the diagnosis. Parents may experience grief, fear, and uncertainty as they grapple with the realization that their child's life, and their own, will not follow the path they once envisioned. These emotions can evolve into chronic stress and

burnout as they manage relentless caregiving responsibilities, advocacy efforts, and the financial pressures that accompany special needs parenting.

Studies have shown that parents of special needs children are at a heightened risk of depression and anxiety. The constant vigilance required to monitor their child's medical or developmental needs, coupled with a lack of respite, can lead to emotional exhaustion. Sleep deprivation is also a common issue, further exacerbating mental health struggles. For many, feelings of isolation compound these challenges. Social outings can feel daunting due to the fear of judgment or the logistical difficulties of accommodating their child's needs.

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The mental health struggles parents face often spill into their marriages, creating fertile ground for conflict. One of the most common sources of marital tension is differing perspectives on how to best support their child. While one parent may advocate for aggressive interventions and therapies, the other might feel hesitant or prefer alternative approaches. These differences can lead to frequent arguments and an erosion of trust.

Another significant stressor is the imbalance of caregiving responsibilities. In many families, one parent, often the mother, takes on the lion's share of care. This can foster resentment, with the caregiving parent feeling unsupported and the other parent feeling sidelined or unappreciated.

Financial stress compounds these issues. The high costs of therapies, medical care, and specialized education can strain even the most financially stable families. Disagreements over spending priorities and fears about long-term financial security can become recurring points of contention.

Perhaps the most insidious source of conflict is when one parent struggles to accept the child's diagnosis. Denial or reluctance to engage with recommended interventions can leave the other parent feeling alone in their efforts. This lack of unity can create a deep emotional rift, with one partner feeling unsupported and the other feeling misunderstood or even judged.

Marital discord doesn't just impact the parents; it can also affect the child. Children with special needs often require stability and consistency from their caregivers to thrive.

When parents are in conflict, this cohesion breaks down, potentially hindering the child's progress and exacerbating existing challenges.

Despite these challenges, many couples manage to strengthen their marriages and mental health through proactive strategies. Open communication is essential, as is mutual respect for each partner's perspective and coping mechanisms. Seeking professional counseling can provide a safe space for couples to navigate their differences and rediscover their shared goals.

Building a support network is equally important. Connecting with other parents of special needs children can provide emotional validation and practical advice. Respite care, even for a few hours, can offer much-needed breaks to recharge and reconnect as a couple.

Finally, prioritizing self-care is crucial. Parents often feel guilty about taking time for themselves, but maintaining their mental health is not just beneficial for them, it's essential for their child's well-being.

The journey of raising a special needs child is uniquely demanding, with challenges that can take a significant toll on mental health and marriage. However, by acknowledging these struggles and seeking support, parents can navigate the difficulties and foster resilience. While the road may be steep, couples who face these challenges together often emerge stronger, united by their love for their child and their commitment to building a nurturing environment for their family.

One Voice Brevard: A 2024 Review

by Nicole Grabner, Editor-In-Chief



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!)



Brevard Uncorked: A Night to Remember

Every year in the month of November, the Brevard Autism Coalition hosts its annual fundraiser, "Brevard Uncorked." This year, the event was held at the beautiful Hotel Melby in downtown Melbourne. The night was hugely successful and featured live entertainment, auctions, and games as well as delicious food and limitless wine. The event aims to broaden awareness of Autism, while also showcasing the amazing programs and supports that our coalition aims to provide for our community. We were fortunate enough to have some amazing sponsors this year (sponsor information featured on last page.). The money raised from this event is set to help programs like Camp2Can, which is a six week summer

camp for children and young adults with autism and related disabilities that aims to build social skills, communication and foster independence. Also, programs like our Spring Prevocational Camp, which teaches skills for future employment.

Our event this year had almost 200 participants and while everyone might not have won a raffle basket or a silent auction, each guest received a \$25 gift card for Unison Spa as well as a small gift bag from Sendala's. The evening also featured guest speakers from our adult program with Angel's Bridging Gaps, where the speakers discussed their experiences and thanking our guests for their support of our program. It was a wonderful night and I hope you are able to mark your calendar for our next event on 14 November 2025. You won't want to miss this amazing event!



Bill Buzz

By: Nicole Grabner

Federal:

Charlotte Woodward Organ Transplant Discrimination Prevention Act (H.R. 2706/S. 1183).

This bill would put federal protections in place to protect people with Down Syndrome and other disabilities from discrimination in receiving an organ transplant. In Florida (2020, CS/HB 1179), put these protections in place, however, federal law does not have the same protections.

Protecting Health Care for All Patients Act (HR. 485).

This bill would prohibit utilization of QALY and similar metrics in federal health programs as they are discriminatory against people with disabilities and is a commonly used metric by programs like Medicaid, to determine treatments and interventions.

SSI Savings and Penalty Elimination Act (HR. 5408/S. 2767). is a bill which increases the allowable assets individuals with disabilities may possess while remaining eligible for government benefits and eliminate the marriage penalty.

State:

- Discussions regarding legislative priorities are underway in preparation for the upcoming Florida State Legislative Session (March-April 2025). Official bills have not been announced yet, but conversations regarding the following are happening now:
- Early intervention
- ESE (public and charter school) program and parent education
- Transition tools and assistance for young adults
- Healthcare access
- FES/UA scholarship
- Supported housing
- Funding the APD pre-enrollment list
- To support these efforts, please reach out to your local legislators and discuss with them your experiences and how crucial their support is.
- Check back on our website/social media for more updates.

Upcoming Legislative Events:

Monday, December 16, 2024

10:30AM – N/A

Legislative Delegation: St. Lucie County

Eastman Advanced Training Complex, Indian River State College, Massey Campus, Ft. Pierce, FL 34981.

To present submit Request Form by noon December 2. Please email

Myishea.white@myfloridahouse.gov or call (772) 595-1391.

Wednesday, January 29, 2025

tentative date/time

Brevard County Legislative Delegation

Cocoa City Hall

Monthly Art Submission



This month's art submission is a fun look at friendship by our very talented Siena Grabner. It is a digital print made with Procreate.

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:
ausomeannouncements@gmail.com



December Events

Thursday, December 3rd is International
People With Disabilities Day

December						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
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				

- Tuesday, December 3rd, Autism Screening, The Children's Center, 5650 S. Washington Ave, Titusville, FL. RSVP to Mary Cancel at 321-292-1370.
- Wednesday, December 4th, Teen Transitions, Support Group for Parents of 11-15-year olds with ASD. On-line Zoom. Sponsored by CARD. Register at Eventbrite: <https://tt24.eventbrite.com> (Always first Wednesday of the month)
- Thursday, December 5th and Tuesday, December 19th, Adults with ASD Forum, 3:00-4:00 p.m. via Zoom. Register at <https://adultasdforum.eventbrite.com>
- Santa's North Pole Outlet by Angels Bridging Gaps. All gifts under \$5.00
 - Saturday, December 7th, BAC, Rockledge
 - Saturday, December 14th, Shore Lanes, Palm Bay
 - Saturday, December 21st, First Baptist Church, Indiatlantic
- Free Autism Parenting Summit, On-line, December 9 - 11, 3 Days, 25 Speakers. Sponsored by Strategic Parenting. Register on Instagram or Facebook.
- SOAK and Early Steps Space Coast will sponsor an Angel Tree, collecting unwrapped toys for our special needs community ages 0-18 yrs. For information on how to sponsor an "angel", contact Mary Cancel for details: Mary.cancel@spacecoasters.org or text/call 321-292-1370. Donations will be picked up by December 11th
- Early Steps Play Groups:
 - Palm Bay Play Group: December 20th, 9:30-10:30 a.m., Palm Bay Library, 1520 Port Malabar Boulevard NE
 - Cocoa Beach Play Group: December 4th, 10:00-11:00 a.m., Catherine Schweinsberg Road Central Library, 308 Forest Ave.
 - Titusville Play Group: December 13th, 9:00-10:00 a.m., The Children Center, 5650 Washington Ave.
- Tuesday, December 10th, Just for Dads!, support group for fathers and grandfathers of children or adults with ASD. Online Zoom. Register at Eventbrite: <https://jfd24-25.eventbrite.com>





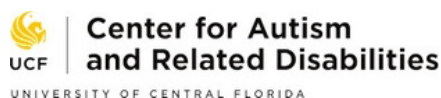
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22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

- Wednesday, December 11th, Support Group for Black Families of Individuals with ASD. 6:30 pm, online Zoom. Register at Eventbrite: <https://BFSCFall.eventbrite.com>
- Thursday, December 12th, Support Group for Parents of Young Children with ASD. 6:00 p.m. Zoom. Register at Eventbrite: <https://poy24.eventbrite.com>
- Saturday, December 14th, Down Syndrome Association of Brevard Holiday Party, 3:30 – 6:30, PSJ Community Center, 6650 Corto Rd, Cocoa, FL. RSVP required: <https://dsabrevard.org/event/holiday-party-2>. DSAB families only.
- Adults with ASD Forum, December 5th and 19th (first and third Thursday of the month), 3-4 p.m. via Zoom. This forum is designed as a safe space for adults with ASD to practice social skills. Register at: <https://adultasdforum.eventbrite.com>





GIVING TUESDAY CAMPAIGN DECEMBER 3



**PLEASE CONSIDER
DONATING TO OUR
NONPROFIT THIS HOLIDAY
SESASON**

THANKFUL




*Nicholas Zollo
& Family*

ALFIE SILVA -
ENTERTAINER

NANCE | CACCIATORE

*The Mayles
Family*



Thank  You

