

Embrace Abilities

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2025 | QUARTER 2



EMBRACING GROWTH

With growth comes change, and we're thrilled to relaunch Hug Happenings as a quarterly newsletter! This new format allows us to share meaningful updates, helpful resources, and inspiring stories—all in one place.

At Embrace Abilities, our mission remains the same: bringing families together, fostering connections, and creating a space where every child feels celebrated and supported. We are so grateful to have you on this journey with us!

Thank you for being part of the Embrace Abilities family. Together, we're building a more inclusive and connected community for all!

BRIDGETT LEE
Founder

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RAINBOW CLEAN MUD

Materials Needed

- Toilet paper
- Soap bar, grated
- Water
- Washable finger paint, all rainbow colors
- Bowls, mixing spoons & cheese grater

Instructions

1. Shred the toilet paper into 1" to 2" pieces.
2. Grate soap with a cheese grater.
3. Mix shredded paper, grated soap, and 4 cups of water. Add more water until fully absorbed.
4. Divide into 6 bowls and mix each with a different color of fingerpaint.
5. Layer colored mud into the sensory bin carefully to keep colors distinct.
6. Cover the bin when not in use. Dispose of after 2-3 days.

<https://sugarspiceandglitter.com/rainbow-clean-mud/>



CREATING A CALM CORNER

A designated calm space at home can be a powerful tool for children who need help self-regulating and unwinding from sensory overload. This doesn't have to be an entire room—just a quiet, comfortable area where they feel safe and supported. Consider a small nook with soft lighting, a cozy chair or bean bag, and sensory-friendly items like weighted blankets, noise-canceling headphones, fidget tools, or a lava lamp.

Personalization is key. Encourage your child to add comforting items such as stuffed animals, favorite books, or calming music.



A small tent or a corner with pillows and a soft rug can create a cozy retreat. This space can serve as a break area after school, a place to reset after outings, or a quiet zone for emotional regulation.

Help your child practice using their calm space proactively, rather than only when they're overwhelmed. Over time, this retreat can become a valuable part of their routine, promoting self-soothing and emotional well-being.

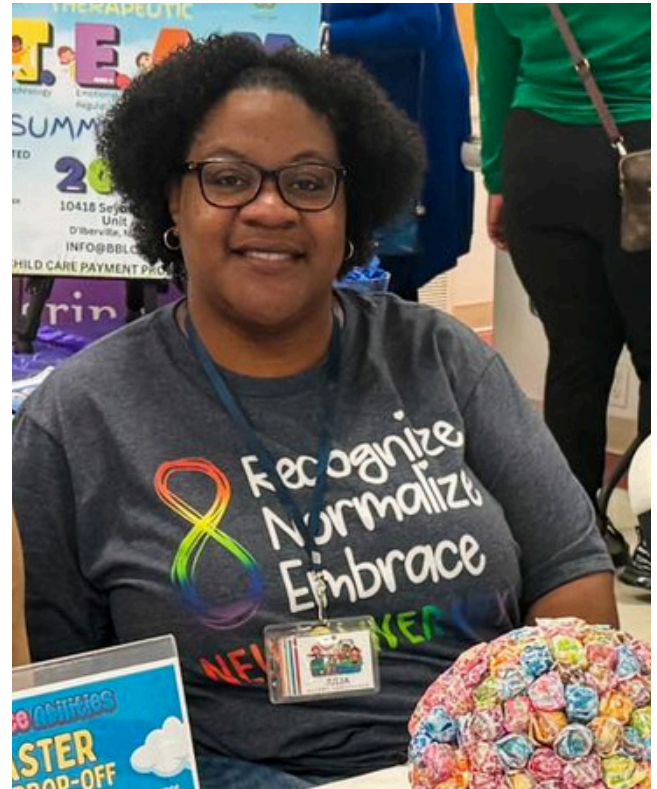
EMBRACE ABILITIES SPOTLIGHTS: CELEBRATING OUR COMMUNITY



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: RILEY

Riley made history as our first-ever Queen Iris for the Krewe of Wonder! At just 4 years old, she lights up every room with her love of singing, dancing, and playing pretend. Her favorite song, The Lion Sleeps Tonight by The Tokens, perfectly matches her joyful and vibrant personality.

Since the age of 2, Riley has benefited greatly from early intervention, starting with First Steps and clinic therapy, and now continuing with school and clinic therapy. Her progress is a beautiful reminder of the importance of early support in helping children thrive.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: JULIA

Julia has been an incredible asset to Embrace Abilities, always spreading the word about our community and fiercely advocating for her son, Reese. She is one of the first to step up, whether it's assisting at events, supporting outreach opportunities, or hosting a park meetup. Julia's dedication, passion, and unwavering support inspire us every day. Her willingness to help wherever needed and her commitment to creating an inclusive community make such a difference. We're so grateful for everything she does to help make our mission possible. Julia, we love and appreciate you!

SENSORY PICKS

At Embrace Abilities, we love sharing tools that promote sensory regulation and motor skill development. This week, we're featuring the Chuckle & Roar Bubble Bestie, a delightful sensory toy with fantastic occupational therapy benefits!



This engaging tool is perfect for building hand strength and fine motor skills, as kids squeeze to create bubbles. It also encourages bilateral coordination (using both hands together) and supports motor planning, helping children sequence and execute movements. The bubbles provide visual and tactile sensory input, which can aid in sensory integration—a key area of focus in occupational therapy for children with autism, ADHD, or sensory processing differences.

Beyond its therapeutic benefits, the Bubble Bestie is durable, washable, and easy to use, making it ideal for therapy sessions, outdoor play, or family activities. It's a fun, screen-free way to encourage active play while supporting developmental milestones.

If you'd like to check it out, you can find it on Amazon here: [Chuckle & Roar Bubble Bestie](#).



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: COASTAL HARMONY

We're excited to collaborate with Coastal Harmony founded by Katlin Ross, to bring the benefits of music to children with different abilities. Music therapy supports speech and language, cognitive skills, motor development, and social growth, especially for children with Autism.

A board-certified music therapist uses music in a purposeful way to help children thrive while also equipping parents with strategies for home. Transition songs can make daily routines smoother and reduce meltdowns, while task analysis songs break down essential skills like handwashing and brushing teeth into easy steps. The right music can turn everyday challenges into opportunities for learning and growth.

Music is a powerful tool! Learn more about Coastal Harmony at coastalharmonymusic.com. We're grateful for this partnership and the joy it brings to our families!



SNOW MUCH FUN!



On January 21, 2025, the Mississippi Gulf Coast saw a historic snowfall, covering our usually warm coast in a blanket of white. For many of our Embrace Abilities families, it was their first time experiencing snow, and they made every moment count!

We loved seeing our friends out in the snow, making memories during this rare winter surprise. Thank you to everyone who shared their snow day photos with us!



JANUARY 2025: KREWE OF WONDER MARDI GRAS BALL

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On January 11, 2025, Embrace Abilities proudly hosted its inaugural Krewe of Wonder Mardi Gras Ball in partnership with the Order of Glaucus and the Junior Auxiliary of Biloxi-Ocean Springs. It was an unforgettable evening filled with joy, celebration, and a true sense of community, bringing families and supporters together to create lasting memories.

The night's tableaux showcased mesmerizing performances that added to the magic of the event. Infinity Dance Company captivated the audience with their beautifully choreographed routines, while Daniel Thomas moved hearts with a stirring rendition of his newest song, *Heart Speaks*.

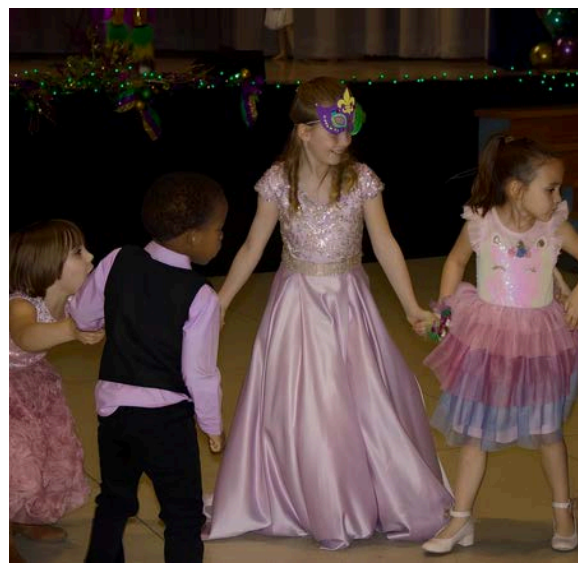
The crowning moment of the evening was the coronation of our first-ever Krewe of Wonder King and Queen. King Thaumas I, Sam Tucker, is a spirited and adventurous 18-year-old with a love for music, swimming, and exploring the outdoors. His playful nature and remarkable sense of balance make him a joy to all who know him. Queen Iris I, Riley Bullock, is a bright and imaginative 4-year-old who adores painting and has made incredible strides in her speech over the past year. Their reign as our inaugural King and Queen was a beautiful celebration of the resilience and spirit of our community.

Adding to the festive atmosphere, the Crown Club of Ocean Springs hosted a delightful craft station where children decorated masks and sashes, taking home their own piece of Mardi Gras magic.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who made this special night possible. DJ Freddie J kept the energy high with an incredible soundtrack, while Alicia Yanik seamlessly guided the evening as our emcee. Drena Ozene gave our kids a well-deserved spotlight by capturing their voices and stories, and Kimberly Allison Photography ensured every moment was beautifully preserved.

A heartfelt thank you to Keesler Federal Credit Union for sponsoring this event, Palace Casino Resort Biloxi for providing water, and Elizabeth Montgomery for generously sponsoring the food.

The Krewe of Wonder Mardi Gras Ball was a night to cherish, and we are excited to build on its success, making it an even more special tradition in the years to come.





FEBRUARY 2025: VALENTINE'S EXCHANGE

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On February 8, 2025, families gathered for a heartwarming Valentine's celebration at The Dream Program, where 52 attendees enjoyed crafts, treats, and quality time with friends. The space was alive with laughter and connection, making for a truly meaningful afternoon.

The event began with a lively Valentine exchange, as kids eagerly handed out cards to their friends. While we learned that leaving the "To" section blank might simplify things next time, the joy and excitement in the room were undeniable. Watching kids compare cards, chat, and delight in the simple act of giving highlighted how impactful these small moments can be.

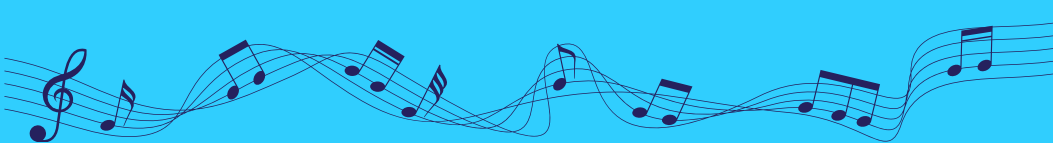


Although a movie was originally planned in the background, technical difficulties led to a last-minute change of plans. Fortunately, no one seemed to mind. The kids were too busy enjoying refreshments, reconnecting with friends, and diving into the sensory bottle craft, which quickly became the star of the day. Each bottle, filled with glitter, beads, and vibrant liquids, was uniquely designed, and the kids took pride in creating and shaking their masterpieces. Beyond the fun, sensory bottles also serve as wonderful tools for relaxation and focus, making them a special keepsake to take home.

The celebration also included honoring our January and February Birthday Buddies. The group singalong—a cherished tradition—brought smiles all around, while a donut hole cake from Tatonut added a sweet touch to the festivities. The kids loved gathering together to celebrate their friends, making the moment even more memorable.



We extend a heartfelt thank you to The Dream Program for hosting us and to every family who joined in. Events like this continue to bring families together, foster lasting friendships, and create a space where every child feels welcomed and celebrated. The joy and engagement we witnessed remind us why we do what we do, and we look forward to many more moments like these.



MARCH 2025: JAMMING WITH COASTAL HARMONY

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On March 15, 2025, families gathered at the Margaret S. Sherry Memorial Library in Biloxi for our first-ever Coastie Jammers event—and what a morning it was! Despite the weather threatening to ruin the day, the skies held off, and the energy inside was electric. This was our first attempt at a more structured activity format, and while it brought a bit of chaos, it was also filled with laughter, learning, and unforgettable moments.

The event was split into two groups to keep things flowing. One group got creative crafting their own tambourines, castanets, and egg shakers, while the other group danced, played instruments, and twirled with colorful scarves. Halfway through, the groups switched, giving everyone a chance to experience both activities. The kids' excitement was contagious as they proudly shook their handmade instruments and moved to the rhythm of the music. While the structure didn't go quite as planned, the joy and energy in the room were undeniable, and we learned so much about how to make future events even smoother.

A huge thank you to Kaitlin from Coastal Harmony for leading the way with her incredible energy and creativity. Her passion brought the event to life, and we're already brainstorming ways to make the next Coastie Jammers even more amazing! We're also deeply grateful to the Margaret S. Sherry Memorial Library for providing such a welcoming and accessible space for this meetup. Your support makes it possible for us to bring inclusive and engaging experiences to the community.

To everyone who joined us—thank you for embracing the fun (and a little chaos!) of this first attempt. Events like this remind us why we do what we do. Seeing the joy, connection, and creativity these moments bring is what it's all about. We're excited to take what we've learned and bring you an even better Coastie Jammers next time. We can't wait to jam with you again soon!



A woman wearing a tan cap and sunglasses is sitting at a green picnic table outdoors. On the table are several water bottles, a bag of snacks, and some children's books. A large blue and clear plastic storage bin filled with toys is on the ground next to the table. In the background, there is a wooden fence and lush green trees.

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KEEPING PARK MEETUPS ALIVE WITH PARENT AMBASSADORS

Park meetups have always been a core part of Embrace Abilities, giving families a space to connect, play, and build friendships. As our community continues to grow, we want to ensure these gatherings remain a consistent and accessible opportunity for families across the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

To help meet this need, we're launching the Parent Ambassador Program! While Embrace Abilities will continue to host one structured event per month, this program allows families to gather more frequently in their own communities with our full support.

Parent Ambassadors will be able to host casual meetups at local parks, providing a space for kids to play while caregivers connect. Families interested in hosting can choose a date, time, and location, then submit it for approval at least two weeks in advance to ensure it fits within our event schedule. Once approved, Embrace Abilities will create and promote the event, making it easier for families to join.

These meetups are designed to be easy and informal, with no structured activities required. However, ambassadors are welcome to bring small items like bubbles, chalk, or outdoor games if they'd like to add a little extra fun!

By expanding our meetups into new areas, this program will allow us to reach more families while ensuring that park gatherings remain a part of Embrace Abilities. With the support of Parent Ambassadors, we can keep these meetups going in a way that is sustainable and community-driven.

The Parent Ambassador Program lets families host local meetups with our support, helping expand connections across the Gulf Coast. Interested? Email info@embraceabilitiesms.org for details!

HUG HAPPENINGS

PARENT AMBASSADORS UNITE: FIRST PARK MEETUPS KICK OFF

On March 22, we had the honor of hosting our very first Parent Ambassador-Led Park Meetup at I.G. Levy Park in Pascagoula, led by the amazing Angela Herman. Seven families joined us, including both new and familiar faces, creating a warm and welcoming space to connect, share, and grow together.

A week later, on March 29, we gathered again for our second meetup at Bayou View Park in Gulfport, led by the



wonderful Julia Moffett. Despite the uncertain weather, four families came out to enjoy meaningful conversations and shared experiences, reminding us of the strength and importance of community.

These meetups are a beautiful testament to the power of connection, and we're so grateful to Angela, Julia, and all the families who made these events possible. Every gathering strengthens the bonds within our community and provides a space for families to feel supported and understood.

If you're interested in hosting a future park meetup, we'd love to hear from you! Becoming a Parent Ambassador is a wonderful way to give back and help foster these meaningful connections.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

On Saturday, March 22, 2025, Embrace Abilities had the privilege of participating in the 3rd Annual Black Families Wellness Expo, hosted by the Gulf Coast MS Chapter of The Links, Incorporated at The First Missionary Baptist Church in Biloxi, MS. This impactful event, part of The Links' National Wellness Expo initiative, focused on raising awareness about health conditions that affect the quality of life in the Black community.

We are deeply grateful to The Links, Incorporated for allowing us to be part of such an inspiring day. The event was an incredible opportunity to connect with families, share resources, and engage with a community that is passionate about inclusion, wellness, and support.



Throughout the morning, we were thrilled to meet so many families who were excited to learn about the resources Embrace Abilities provides. It was also a joy to connect with allied professionals who are doing amazing work in their fields. These meaningful conversations and connections inspire us to continue building bridges and collaborating with others who share our vision for inclusion and empowerment.

A heartfelt thank-you goes to our dedicated volunteers, Brittany and Julia, for representing Embrace Abilities with such care and enthusiasm. Your time and efforts made our participation in this event truly special. We also want to extend a special shoutout to Jenny for stopping by to check in and show her support—it means the world to us!

We are already looking forward to next year's Black Families Wellness Expo and continuing to strengthen our relationship with this amazing community.

UPCOMING EVENTS



APRIL 12, 2025

Join us for a fun-filled Easter celebration at Embrace Abilities! Our Easter Egg Hunt will take place from 10 AM to 12 PM, offering a sensory-friendly experience designed for children of all abilities to enjoy. We'll have special prizes, games, and a chance to meet the Easter Bunny!

JACKSON COUNTY SOCCER COMPLEX

4400 Audubon Lane Gautier, MS 39553



MAY 17, 2025

Join us for a Sensory-Friendly Movie Night featuring Moana 2! The fun kicks off at 3 PM with a special visit from Moana, followed by a cozy movie experience. Bring your blankets and pillows, grab a comfy spot, and enjoy a relaxed, sensory-friendly evening. **Registration is required.**

ST. PAUL OCEAN SPRINGS

6716 US-90, Ocean Springs, MS 39564



JUNE 7, 2025

Get ready to move with us during a FUN-ctional Fitness Morning in partnership with Encore Rehabilitation! We're planning to kick things off around 10 AM with movement-based games and activities that promote strength, balance, and coordination—designed for all abilities. Final location details are coming soon. **Registration is required.**

LOCATION TBD

OUR SPONSORS

We are deeply grateful to our sponsors for their generous support, which enables Embrace Abilities to provide free, inclusive events and resources for families across the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Your contributions help us foster friendships, connect caregivers, and build a supportive community for children and teens with diverse needs.

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ALMEIDA'S MEXICAN RESTAURANT
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SUPPORT OUR MISSION! YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS HELP US CREATE INCLUSIVE EVENTS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES ACROSS THE GULF COAST. EMAIL INFO@EMBRACEABILITIESMS.ORG OR CALL (228) 400-5011.

HUG HAPPENINGS