



Embrace Abilities

NEWSLETTER

JULY 2025 | QUARTER 3



THRIVING TOGETHER

As we move through this busy season, it's been incredible to see our Embrace Abilities community in action. Over the past few months, we've welcomed new families, launched fresh programs, and watched friendships blossom at our events—from movie nights and park meetups to special collaborations with local partners. Each gathering has brought new energy, ideas, and opportunities to celebrate every child and caregiver in our circle. Thank you for showing up, sharing your stories, and making this community stronger with every connection. We're excited to look back on our recent highlights—and even more excited for what's ahead!

BRIDGETT LEE

Founder

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SHAVING CREAM CONES

Materials Needed

- Ice cream cones and scoop set
- Food Coloring
- Shaving cream

Instructions

1. For each color you want to make, mix shaving cream with food coloring in a bowl. Start with just a little splash of color and then increase depending on your preferred vibrancy.
2. Layer each color in a single bin.
3. Fill another container with water. Whether your child enjoys mess or not, this is crucial for extending the length of this activity and allows for washing hands off.
4. Sit back and let them play!

<https://7daysofplay.com/shaving-cream-cones-fun-shaving-cream-activity/>



CELEBRATING SMALL WINS

In the world of different abilities, progress often happens in small, meaningful steps. Maybe your child tried something new, managed a tough transition, or communicated a need in a new way. These moments might seem minor, but they are worth celebrating! Take time as a family to notice and acknowledge these everyday victories. You could use a sticker chart, share a special treat, or simply offer a few words of encouragement. Some families enjoy keeping a "Victory Jar," adding notes about small successes throughout the week and reading them together as a



reminder of how far everyone has come.

Celebrating small wins helps build confidence and motivation—not just for your child, but for everyone in the family. It shifts the focus to progress and effort, showing that every step forward matters. Over time, this positive habit can help children see their strengths and feel proud of their achievements, no matter how big or small.

EMBRACE ABILITIES SPOTLIGHTS: CELEBRATING OUR COMMUNITY



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: DAVID

David is a joyful 10-year-old who lights up every room with his love of stuffed animals, movies, and swinging at the park. Elmo is his favorite character, and blueberries are his top snack—he's rarely seen without a plush friend by his side. David's incredible memory shines as he scripts and memorizes his favorite movies and videos, using screen time as an important tool for learning and self-regulation. His journey is a beautiful reminder that every child's strengths are unique and that finding a supportive community helps every child and family feel seen, included, and celebrated.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: ANGELA

Angela has been an incredible asset to Embrace Abilities since joining our community as a mom seeking support and connection. As a Parent Ambassador, she's one of the first to step up—helping us host more events, welcoming new families, and making sure everyone feels included. Angela's warmth, dedication, and support inspire us every day. Her willingness to jump in wherever needed and her commitment to building an inclusive community make a real difference for our families. We're so grateful for everything she does to help make our mission possible. Angela, we appreciate you so much!

SENSORY LIBRARY

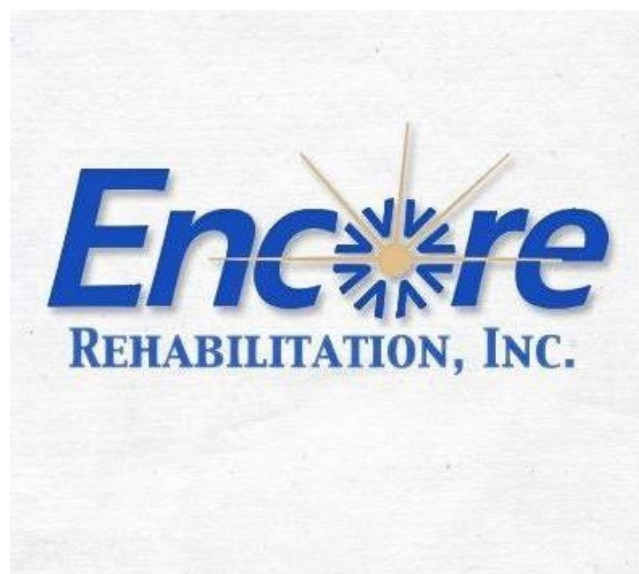
At Embrace Abilities, we're always looking for ways to make our events more accessible and inclusive for everyone. This quarter, we're thrilled to share that we've received a generous community grant from Walmart Ocean Springs, which has allowed us to launch our Sensory Lending Library for families!



Our Sensory Lending Library is thoughtfully stocked with a range of sensory supports—like weighted flip sequin pads, a variety of fidgets, and noise-canceling headphones—to help individuals manage sensory input and feel comfortable at our gatherings. These tools are especially helpful for children and young adults with autism, ADHD, or sensory processing differences, providing calming input and supporting emotional regulation.

Having the library available at our monthly meetups means anyone who needs a little extra support can borrow sensory items and participate more fully in the fun. It's one more way we're working to remove barriers and ensure every family feels welcome and included at Embrace Abilities events.

We're deeply grateful to Walmart Ocean Springs for their belief in our mission and their commitment to building a more sensory-friendly community. Their support is making a real difference for families across the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and we can't wait to see the positive impact our Sensory Lending Library will have!



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: ENCORE REHABILITATION

We're grateful to collaborate with Encore Pediatric Rehabilitation, whose partnership connects us with dedicated therapists from Ocean Springs Pediatric Rehab. At our Easter event, their team volunteered to welcome families at check-in, making everyone feel comfortable and included. In June, we also teamed up for a Functional Fun meetup, where their expertise helped create a supportive and engaging experience for our families.

These professionals bring compassion, knowledge, and a commitment to helping children with different abilities grow and thrive. Their involvement helps make our events more welcoming and meaningful for everyone. Ocean Springs Pediatric Rehab offers physical, occupational, and speech therapy services to support children's development in every way. For more information, call (228) 818-1211. We're thankful for this partnership and the positive impact it brings to our community!

CONNECTING GENERATIONS

For Mother's Day and Father's Day this spring, Embrace Abilities families visited Truewood, an assisted living facility in Ocean Springs. Our group spent time passing out goodies, sharing smiles, and making new friends with the residents. It was a special chance for our kids to practice social skills, show kindness, and brighten someone's day. We loved seeing connections form across generations and are grateful to everyone who joined us for this meaningful visit!



APRIL 2025: EMBRACE ABILITIES EGG HUNT

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On April 12, 2025, Embrace Abilities proudly hosted its first annual Easter Egg Hunt at the Jackson County Soccer Complex in Gautier. This special event was designed to create an inclusive and joyful experience, ensuring every child could participate and celebrate together in a welcoming environment.

The morning was bright and beautiful, setting the perfect stage for springtime fun. Families were greeted by a vibrant atmosphere and a variety of engaging booths from our allied professionals—Building Behaviors Counseling Service, All Children Can Learn, Empowered Pathways, and The Learning Hive—each offering hands-on activities and valuable resources. Mayor Casey Vaughan of Gautier joined in, helping lay out eggs and welcoming families, while the city delighted kids with a visit from a fire truck that sparked plenty of excitement.

Thanks to the generosity of our community, over 3,000 eggs were dropped across the fields, including 35 prize eggs with Five Below gift cards, and two lucky winners received sensory-friendly Easter baskets. Volunteers from Encore Rehabilitation, along with many others, helped with check-in, crafts, sensory bins, and stations for hair color and temporary tattoos. The Easter Bunny made a cheerful appearance, greeting families and posing for photos, adding a touch of magic to the day.

A memorable moment came as we introduced our 2025–26 Board of Directors, marking an exciting new chapter for Embrace Abilities. Allergy-friendly treats ensured every child could safely enjoy the festivities, and thoughtful accommodations made the event accessible for all. The smiles, laughter, and connections formed throughout the morning were a true reflection of our mission to foster inclusion and community.

We are deeply grateful to our allied professionals, Mayor Vaughan, city officials, volunteers, and everyone who donated eggs and time. Your support made this day truly special and brought our vision to life.

Our first annual Easter Egg Hunt was a wonderful celebration of inclusion and community spirit. We can't wait to build on this tradition and create even more cherished memories in the years ahead.





MAY 2025: MOANA 2 MOVIE MATINEE

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On May 17, 2025, Embrace Abilities proudly hosted its first sensory-friendly movie night at St. Paul East Campus in Ocean Springs, welcoming families for an evening of adventure, inclusion, and community spirit. Designed with accessibility and comfort in mind, the event gave every child the chance to experience the magic of Moana 2 in a supportive, relaxed environment.

Families arrived to find a welcoming space with calming, sensory-friendly lighting, flexible seating, and a dedicated sensory area featuring bins, coloring pages, and gentle lighting. For anyone needing a break, a calm-down room was available so everyone could participate at their own pace.




A highlight of the night was a special visit from Moana herself, who sang for the crowd and led a cheerful "Happy Birthday" for a few of our birthday kiddos before heading off on her next adventure. To help kids feel comfortable, a countdown timer was used for transitions, making the experience smooth and predictable.

Moana handed out leis to the children, adding a festive touch. Volunteers from the Dream Program assisted with cleanup and popcorn prep, and their adults with disabilities joined in and enjoyed the movie alongside our families. Fresh popcorn, snacks, and cupcakes for the birthday children made the evening even sweeter.



We are deeply grateful to the Dream Program, our volunteers, and all the families who joined us for this special night. Your support and enthusiasm brought the spirit of Moana to life and helped create a truly inclusive experience.

Our first sensory-friendly movie night was a wonderful celebration of community, accessibility, and joy. We look forward to hosting more movie nights and special events, building cherished memories and strong connections for years to come.



JUNE 2025: FUNCTION JUNCTION WITH ENCORE REHABILITATION

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On June 7, 2025, Embrace Abilities partnered with the physical therapists from Encore Pediatric Rehabilitation for a special Function Junction event at Cheer Force One in Ocean Springs. This collaboration brought together children, young adults, and families for a day of movement, confidence-building, and community connection.

Cheer Force One's gymnastics gym provided an accessible and dynamic space for everyone to explore and play. Parents were welcomed onto the mat to assist their children, and volunteers worked one-on-one with participants who needed extra support. The group was divided into three smaller teams, allowing everyone to rotate through a variety of engaging activities at their own pace.

Encore's talented team planned and led all the activities, including dancing, Simon Says, red light/green light, animal walks, trampoline time, and a creative obstacle course. Each station was designed to encourage movement, build motor skills, and spark joy. The energy in the gym was contagious, and it was wonderful to see so many new faces joining our community—especially with the event now open to participants up to age 21.

After an active session, everyone enjoyed snacks and drinks to refuel and connect. The collaboration with Encore was especially meaningful, as many of their therapists are already a part of our families' lives, making the day feel even more personal and supportive. The activities helped build confidence and created opportunities for new friendships and memories.

We are deeply grateful to the Encore Pediatric Rehabilitation team for their expertise and enthusiasm, to Cheer Force One for providing such a welcoming space, and to our dedicated volunteers and families for making Function Junction a success.

Function Junction was a joyful celebration of movement, inclusion, and partnership. We look forward to more collaborations and opportunities for our families to connect, grow, and thrive together.



UNVEILING OUR AGE GROUPS

Little Legends celebrates the bright beginnings of our youngest members, inviting children ages 3 to 11 to discover, play, and grow together. This group is all about building confidence, friendships, and joyful memories in an inclusive environment. Through fun activities and supportive connections, every Little Legend is encouraged to shine in their own unique way. We believe that every child has something special to offer, and Little Legends is where those first big steps are celebrated together.



Legend Makers is our group for adventurous preteens, teens, and young adults, ages 12 to 21, who are ready to explore new possibilities and make their mark on the world. This group empowers members to build leadership skills, grow friendships, and celebrate every milestone in a supportive, inclusive space where everyone belongs. Through engaging activities, meaningful connections, and opportunities for personal growth, Legend Makers inspires each participant to dream big, discover their strengths, and step confidently into their future. We believe every Legend Maker has the power to shape their own story and inspire others along the way. Together, we're building a vibrant community where these journeys are valued, supported, and celebrated at every step.



BRINGING SIBSHOPS TO OUR COMMUNITY

We're excited to partner with Coast Happy Families and The Arc in Gulfport to bring Sibshops to the Mississippi Gulf Coast! Our first Sibshops session will be July 19th. These lively, high-energy events are for siblings of children with special needs, giving them a space to connect, play games, and share their experiences.

At Sibshops, kids meet others who truly understand what it's like to have a sibling with different abilities. Through fun activities and supportive discussions, they'll build friendships, learn coping skills, and discover they're not alone. We can't wait to welcome families and grow this supportive community together.



MEET THE FACILITATOR: SUMMER WILTON

Summer Wilton is a certified Sibshop facilitator with a deeply personal connection to the sibling experience. When her middle child's sudden regression affected their whole family, Summer saw her eldest struggle with confusion and loneliness. Wanting to help, she became trained through Sibshop to give siblings a place to connect, share, and feel understood. Summer is passionate about helping kids build friendships, learn coping skills, and know they're not alone. She looks forward to welcoming families and making Sibshop a supportive space for everyone. Her hope is that every sibling leaves feeling seen, valued, and empowered.

PLAY & CONNECT: BRINGING FAMILIES TOGETHER

Our Play & Connect pop-up park meetups, led by our dedicated Parent Ambassadors Julia and Angela, are a wonderful way for families to come together and build meaningful connections. These gatherings offer a relaxed, welcoming environment where both new and returning families can enjoy outdoor play, share experiences, and support one another through the ups and downs of parenting.

Each meetup is shaped by the unique



energy of the families who attend, with spontaneous conversations, laughter, and moments of encouragement. Parents often exchange tips, celebrate small victories, and find comfort in knowing they're not alone on their journey. The informal nature of these events makes it easy for everyone to participate at their own pace, whether it's joining in a group activity or simply enjoying time in the fresh air.

We're incredibly grateful to Julia, Angela, and all the families who make these connections possible. Their commitment and enthusiasm help create a sense of community where every family feels seen, supported, and included. If you're interested in helping lead future Play & Connect meetups, we'd love to welcome more Parent Ambassadors to our team.

EMBRACE ABILITIES NAMED SMALLS TOWN HERO

Embrace Abilities was honored to be named the Smalls Town Hero by Smalls Sliders during the grand opening festivities of their new Biloxi location. Smalls Town Hero is a special recognition program that celebrates local organizations making a positive impact in their communities. Owner Matt Gallagher presented Embrace Abilities with a \$1,000 donation, supporting our mission to create inclusive opportunities for children and families of all abilities along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

The Smalls Sliders team welcomed us warmly, shining a spotlight on the work we do to foster acceptance, connection, and growth for neurodiverse children. This partnership highlights the importance of community support and the difference that local businesses can make by investing in organizations that serve families.

Being selected as a Smalls Town Hero is a meaningful affirmation of our efforts to build a more inclusive community. This donation will help us expand our programs, reach more families, and continue offering events that empower children and young adults. We are deeply grateful to Smalls Sliders, Matt Gallagher, and everyone who made this recognition possible.

Moments like these remind us that collaboration and kindness are at the heart of real community change. We look forward to continuing our work and building even stronger partnerships in Biloxi and beyond, ensuring every family has a place to belong and thrive.

We are excited for the future and grateful to be part of such a supportive and caring community.

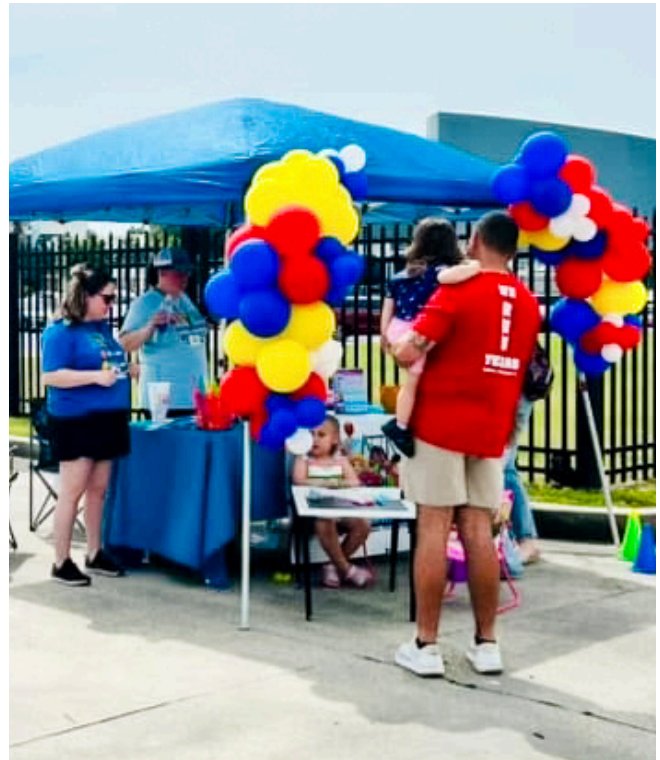


STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Last quarter, Embrace Abilities was honored to participate in a series of community events that deepened our relationships and expanded our reach across the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

On April 19th, we joined the Gulfport Police Department's Autism Safety Day—a meaningful opportunity to connect with families, share resources, and raise awareness about inclusion and safety. We're grateful to Jenny, Ashley, and Felica for representing Embrace Abilities with such care and energy, meeting new faces and building important connections with both families and allied professionals.

June 28th was especially exciting, as we participated in two wonderful events.



At the A Latte Friends Family & Caregiver Appreciation event, our founder Bridgett and board member Iliana connected with families and expressed our gratitude for A Latte Friends' ongoing support—partnerships like theirs truly make a difference. The event was filled with heartfelt conversations, laughter, and a real sense of community. Meanwhile, at SPOT Therapy's Gulf Coast Disability Celebration, board member Maryjo represented us, helping connect with families, professionals, and advocates to celebrate inclusion and share resources. Both events were great opportunities to further our mission. Thank you to Jenny, Ashley, Felica, Iliana, Maryjo, and Bridgett for making our presence possible. Their commitment helps us build a stronger, more connected community, and we look forward to more opportunities to support families across the Gulf Coast. What a wonderful Saturday connecting with families!



UPCOMING EVENTS



JULY 12, 2025

Join us for a sweet morning at our Legend Makers (Ages 12–21) Ice Cream Social at Quakes Ice Creamery, from 10 AM to 11 AM! Every individual with different abilities gets a free scoop with a topping, and families are welcome to join. Enjoy a relaxed, crowd-free space to socialize and make memories. Spots are limited—register today!

QUAKES ICE CREAMERY

1922 Bienville Blvd, Ocean Springs, MS 39564



JULY 13, 2025

Join us for a day of exploration and friendship at our Little Legends (Ages 3–11) meetup during Sensory Sunday at Lynn Meadows Discovery Center, from 10 AM to 12 PM! Enjoy sensory-friendly activities, hands-on play, and a chance for kids to make new friends. Parents and caregivers can connect with others.

LYNN MEADOWS

246 Dolan Ave, Gulfport, MS 39507



JULY 19, 2025

We're excited to welcome siblings to a special Sibshop—a day just for them! This drop-off event runs from 10 AM to 1 PM and is all about friends, fun, and celebrating siblings. Led by facilitator Summer Wilton, kids will enjoy creative activities, group games, and time to connect in a supportive space.

ARC OF THE GULF COAST

3109 Gulf Ave, Gulfport, MS 39501

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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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