

# Advocating Daily



## EDUCATING AND EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Volume 8, Issue 1

Summer 2014

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### Now Green!

**FHF-SELA is now publishing our newsletter online only! For a paper letter please call today! 504-943-0343 or 1-877-243-7352**

FHF-SELA receives partial funding from Metropolitan Human Services District, the State Department of Education, the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council, Family to Family Health Information Center, Amerigroup, Xerox Corporation, LSU Health Science Center, and Early Steps.

Opinions contained herein do not necessarily represent those of the funding sources, and no endorsement should be inferred.

### As we embark on a new fiscal year...

I would like to share my story and how I came to Families Helping Families of Southeast Louisiana. Seven years ago, my son was diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Delay (NOS). I had no clue what that was and I was devastated. I didn't know what to do or where to turn. I thought, "How will my child be successful in school or even in the world as he grows?"

That same year, I found Families Helping Families of Southeast Louisiana. When I talked to the staff, my attitude instantly changed. I was told that my son could in fact be successful in school with the right supports and services. The Families Helping Families staff linked me with several resources to help my family. Within the next five years my two other sons were also diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and my husband lost his sight due to diabetes. I went from devastation to being a proud mom of three sons, ages, 16, 10 and 7, with Autism, and an amazing daughter, age 19.

At Families Helping Families, I was supported and guided, and had a safe space to express my worry and stress. In those conversations I discovered that I wanted to help parents like me.

I wanted to help make a difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families. Now, five years later I am honored to serve as the Interim Executive Director for the same organization that offered me the knowledge and wisdom to help my son. That is why we say here, "It's who we are- it's what we do."

We are a group of self-advocates, parents, siblings, and caregivers of individuals with disabilities. We want your selves, children, siblings, and family members to be as successful as ours. I don't know where I would be if Families Helping Families of Southeast Louisiana or an organization like it did not exist. As I serve as the Interim Executive Director we will add new components to our existing programs and build new partnerships, and we will be here for a very long time.



## Families Helping Families of Southeast Louisiana Services and Programs

FHF of SELA is a 501(c)3 non-profit resource center for individuals with disabilities and their families. For more information about the services and programs we provide, please call 504-943-0343.

### PROGRAMS

#### ALL AGES

*Louisiana Deafblind Project* ♦ A statewide technical assistance and dissemination project, which provides technical assistance, training, and information to enhance services for children and youth 0 – 22 who have the diagnosis deafblindness.

*LA Citizens for Action Now (LaCAN)* ♦ A statewide grassroots network for individuals and families advocating for a service system supporting individuals with disabilities to live in their own homes rather than a facility.

#### 0-3

*Early Steps Community Outreach Specialist* ♦ The specialist visits hospitals and clinics with information about Early Steps for hospitals, clinics and parents who have children who may exhibit developmental delay.

#### 4 – 14

*Education Advocate* (Funded by the State Department of Education) ♦ Advocates for all students to be in regular education and community settings to ensure full and valued membership in society, provides workshops, presentations, and one-to-one support. Advocates for children to be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment and educates parents on being their child's advocate.

*The Prism Project of Greater NOLA: Roux-Roux Productions (TPP of GNO)* ♦ A performing arts program for children aged 6-14, with and without special needs. TPP of GNO teaches children dance, music, and theater, creating an original performance.

#### 15 – 22

*Career Symposium* ♦ A multi-faceted workshop for students with disabilities, their families, and teachers to better prepare students with disabilities to have meaningful careers after high school.

*Transition Advocate* (Funded by the State Department of Education) ♦ Trains, educates and empowers families

and professionals to develop Individualized Transition Plans.

#### 22 +

*People First of NOLA* ♦ An adult advocacy group for people with disabilities ♦

### SERVICES

#### INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

- ♦ Information and referral for evaluations, medical services, Medicare, Medicaid, and Crisis Intervention ♦
- ♦ Information on community programs, services and opportunities ♦
- ♦ Educational materials, disability-friendly apps, and publications ♦
- ♦ Internet and personal resources across all three parishes ♦

#### EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Workshops on caregivers, transition, education, IEP/504, school and family partnerships, communication, healthcare, advocacy and more.

Register for our latest workshops online or by calling 504-943-0343.

#### PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT

Continuous information, guidance, and support from our employees who are parents, siblings, and self-advocates.

### OUR VISION

We envision a region where people with disabilities live and are fully included in school, work, and recreational activities.

### OUR MISSION

Families Helping Families of Southeast Louisiana's mission is to educate and empower individuals with disabilities, their families, professionals, and communities by providing resources, training, and family-to-family support.

# SPECIAL EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT



My name is Patricia Ventura. I am blessed: my passion is my career! Every day, for the past 25 years, I get an opportunity to positively impact the lives of individuals with disabilities. It has been a purposeful, challenging, and rewarding journey...and I pray for another 25 years!

As the saying goes, *you have to know where you've been, to know where you are going.*

## Where have I been?

I started my career as an inner-city self-contained special education teacher for students with emotional disturbances, then moved out of the classroom – as an educational diagnostician (pupil appraisal) in one of the largest school systems in the nation (pre-Katrina).

I later left the K-12 setting to accept a faculty appointment at Dillard University (DU), where I taught

special education content and methodology to education majors; and, directed a six-week inclusionary summer camp for kiddos who had gifted and disability IEPs, as well as those who had neither. My appointment at DU came to end three years ago, with the closing of its' education department. After rigorous reflection, I decided not to continue in higher education: instead,

I chose to return to the K-12 environment.

Though this time around, the landscape of public education in New Orleans had drastically changed: charter schools...proving to be the most impactful systems intervention in the history of public education in the United States – the largest reform movement in public education to date!

## Where am I going?

For the last three years, I have been blessed with the opportunity to positively impact the lives of individuals with disabilities, and their families in many cases, in K-12 charter schools. First, I worked for the Recovery School District – Portfolio – as Special Education Specialist: Charter Oversight. There, I collaborated on several projects pertinent to special education in

charter schools. Chief amongst these projects was the development and implementation a pilot program for assessing the compliance of charter schools with special education law and policy. I was the lead designer of the process, lead the school-level oversight efforts, and the chief analyst and author of the resulting reports that were provided to the participating charter schools.

Currently, and for the last year and half, I am the Executive Director of Student Support Services, New Beginnings Schools Foundation (NBSF).

*“You have to know where you've been, to know where you are going.”*

NBSF is a charter management organization that is

responsible for the management of four charter schools: two PK-8, one K-8, and one 9-12. Here, I am charged and held accountable for the oversight of special services within our four school – special education programming, services, and compliance being, by far, the most complex. I would not want it any other way!

Serving in this capacity has been one of the most challenging and rewarding professional experiences I have been blessed to have. On an on-going daily basis, I get to be me: passionate, resourceful, kid/parent advocate, and fight for social justice: access and opportunity to public education for ALL kiddos!



# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

**This year's legislative session was very successful!**

**Families Helping Families** across the state has restored \$170,000 in funding for nine centers!

\$762,000 has been restored for **Vocational Rehabilitation!**

All **Waiver Slots** funding has been restored for vacant slots and additional slots have been approved! This includes 200 New Waiver slots, 1,000 NOW, CC and Supports Waiver slots!

## FHF-SELA Staff:

**Aisha Johnson**  
*Interim Executive Director*

**Sharla Lynn Green**  
*Data Entry Specialist*

**Rickii Ainey**  
*Information and Referral Specialist  
(METROPOLITAN HUMAN SERVICES DISTRICT)*

**Janice Alexander**  
*Information and Referral Specialist  
(METROPOLITAN HUMAN SERVICES DISTRICT)*

**Jane Rhea Vernier**  
*Intern  
(TULANE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK)*

**Shay Hunter**  
*Assistant Director*

**Cynthia Smith**  
*Bookkeeper*

**Fay Daspit**  
*Transition Advocate  
(STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION)*

**Vanessa Herrera**  
*Education Advocate  
(STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION)*

## FHF-SELA Board of Directors:

**Donnica Conway-Strawder**  
*Board Chairman*

**Willie Martin**  
*Vice Chairman*

**Claudia Smith, BSM**  
*Secretary*

**Jim Durbin, Jr., CPA**  
*Treasurer*

**Everett Henderson**

**Kim Jones**

**Molly Sullivan**

**Brenda Valteau**

## JULY

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
					OFFICE CLOSED	
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
		People First Meeting				NOLA Ready!
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
						FHF-SELA Garage Sale!
27	28	29	30	31		
			MHSD Event			

Quarterly Self Direction Forum  
2:00 pm- 3:00 pm  
New Orleans Public Library  
4300 S. Broad St, NOLA 70125

Workshops every  
Mon, Wed & Fri  
10:00am-1:00pm IEP  
beginning to end

People First meets 4:30-  
6:00pm in 254 and 256  
of the Healing Center  
2372 St Claude Ave

ARE YOU READY  
FOR HURRICANE SEASON?  
11:00 am- 1:00 pm  
Robert E. Smith Library  
6301 Canal Blvd, NOLA 70124

## AUGUST

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	FHF-SELA Board	People First Meeting				
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

## SEPTEMBER

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	OFFICE CLOSED					
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
		People First Meeting				
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**2014 Turkey Bowl**  
**Sunday, November 23**  
**1:00 pm**  
**Location TBA**





## **NOW SEEKING BOARD MEMBERS**

**Are you interested in serving on the FHF-SELA Board? Please call Aisha Johnson at (504) 943-0343 ext. 204 or email [ajohnson@fhfsela.org](mailto:ajohnson@fhfsela.org).**

**Our board meetings are open to and welcome the public.**

**Meetings are held at 6pm on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of even numbered months.**

**The remaining scheduled 2014 Board Meetings are August 18, October 20 and December 15.**

**Meetings are held in the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor conference room.  
7240 Crowder Blvd**

## **THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS!**

### **THANK YOU TO OUR MAJOR DONORS!**

FHF of SELA is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. We rely on contracts with organizations, partnerships with community groups, grants, and private donations. Through these incredible organizations and people, FHF of SELA is able to provide free services and programming to families and professionals across Orleans, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard Parishes. It is all thanks to these supporters and the anonymous donors that enable our organization to assist thousands of families across the Greater New Orleans Region achieve education and empowerment.

### **GRANTS**

**Amerigroup  
The Davis-Molony Fund  
The Frost Foundation  
The Louisiana Bar Foundation  
The New Orleans Jazz & Heritage  
Foundation  
Xerox Corporation**

# MAKE A DONATION TODAY!

**\$5** connects families without  
internet to accurate  
resources

**\$10** provides a student with  
a disability tools for a career

**\$30** covers the cost of  
participating in The Prism  
Project of Greater  
New Orleans

**\$72** enables two adults with  
disabilities to become  
empowered self-advocates

**\$150** allows a child with  
special needs to attend  
summer camp

Your donation could help families of people with special needs connect with accurate resources, provide recreational opportunities to children with special needs, teach parents or people with disabilities self-advocacy skills, or provide a student with a disability the means to a dream career.

**Thank you for your support!**

**All donations are tax-deductible**

You can make a donation online by clicking Donate at  
[www.fhfsela.org](http://www.fhfsela.org)

Scan the QR Reader

OR



Mail in your donation with the form below to

Families Helping Families of Southeast Louisiana  
7240 Crowder Blvd. Suite 202  
New Orleans, LA 70127

**Yes, I would like to donate and learn more about Families Helping Families of Southeast Louisiana!**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Parish: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: ☐ Parent ☐ Sibling ☐ Self-Advocate ☐ Professional ☐ Family Member ☐ Donor

Please add me to your mailing list: ☐ Yes ☐ No

I would like to donate:

☐ \$5 ☐ \$10 ☐ \$30 ☐ \$72 ☐ \$150 ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to volunteer or apply for an internship: ☐ Yes ☐ No

I would like information about: \_\_\_\_\_



### Still Waiting for Waiver Services?

#### Join LaCAN NOW!

LaCAN (Louisiana Citizens for Action Now) is a statewide grassroots network of individuals and families who have worked together since 1988 advocating for a system that supports individuals live in their own homes rather than having to move to a facility to receive needed services.

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE! JOIN LACAN!**

[www.lacanadvocates.org](http://www.lacanadvocates.org)

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

**JOIN LACAN!**



**LaTEACH**  
Louisiana Together Educating ALL Children

**LaTEACH** (Louisiana Together Educating All Children) is a grassroots network of individuals that believe all children should have the opportunity to be educated with their typical peers in a typical classroom.

**LaTEACH** has made great strides this year, but we still need **YOU** to help make a difference in improving education for our children with disabilities.

**PLEASE CONTACT**  
[www.lateach.org](http://www.lateach.org)



### What is LaDisAbilityTalk?

It's an email talk list from Louisiana Parent Training and Information Center/Families Helping Families of Jefferson to help families of people with disabilities and their advocates share information, resources, and support.

#### What's a talk list?

It's a way for email users to be in a group with others who have similar interests.

#### Who should join?

Parents of children with disabilities, self-advocates, and advocates of people with disabilities in Louisiana

**How do I join?** Just send an email to:  
[fhfpromter@yahoo.com](mailto:fhfpromter@yahoo.com) or

[LaDisabilityTalk-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:LaDisabilityTalk-subscribe@yahoo.com)

**FREE-FREE-FREE**

Like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/FHFofSELA](http://www.facebook.com/FHFofSELA) follow us on Twitter @FHFofSELA & Pinterest FHFSELA to stay up-to-date on all exciting events, articles of interest, links to other advocacy groups, information on trainings and more!



Website: [www.fhfseila.org](http://www.fhfseila.org)

Email: [info@fhfseila.org](mailto:info@fhfseila.org)

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**FHF of SELA**



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