



Hope Lives Here

Newsletter

June 2026

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A Summer of Possibility

Summer carries a different rhythm. The days seem a little longer, the sunlight lingers a little later, and opportunities often appear where routine once lived. It invites us to pause, to explore, and to imagine what might be possible. For individuals with exceptionalities and their families, possibility is not defined by perfection—it is found in every new experience, every open door, and every moment that reminds us hope is still unfolding.

Discovering New Paths

Every journey begins with a willingness to take the next step. Sometimes that step is trying a new activity, meeting someone who understands your story, or finding a resource that changes the direction of tomorrow. Possibility often begins long before we realize how far it will lead us.

Finding Joy in the Journey

Summer reminds us that meaningful moments are often found in the simplest experiences. A walk through the park, a community event, laughter shared with loved ones, or accomplishing something once thought impossible can become memories that strengthen both confidence and connection. Joy grows when we celebrate progress, no matter how small it may seem.

Doors Were Meant to Be Opened

Every family deserves access to opportunities that encourage independence, belonging, and purpose. Whether it is discovering employment resources, healthcare supports, educational programs, or social connections, each new opportunity represents another doorway waiting to be explored. No family should feel that these doors are meant for someone else.

Stronger Together

The journey becomes lighter when it is shared. Families, educators, therapists, advocates, neighbors, churches, and community partners each have a role in creating places where individuals with exceptionalities are welcomed, encouraged, and valued. Together, we build communities where everyone has the opportunity to flourish.

Hope on the Horizon

As the summer season unfolds, may we continue looking toward what is possible rather than focusing on what feels impossible. Every sunrise offers another chance to learn, every conversation creates another connection, and every act of compassion reminds us that brighter days are always ahead.



Exceptionality of the Month: Aphasia

What Is Aphasia?

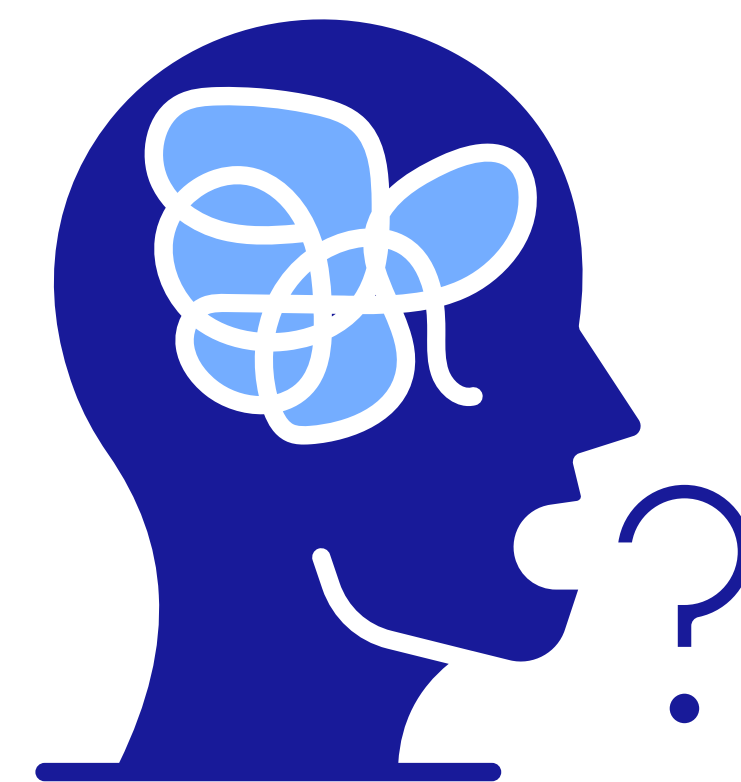
Aphasia is a communication disorder caused by damage to the parts of the brain responsible for language. It can affect a person's ability to speak, understand conversations, read, and write. Aphasia is most often caused by a stroke, but it can also result from a brain injury, brain tumor, or certain neurological conditions. Importantly, aphasia affects communication—not intelligence. People with aphasia still have thoughts, ideas, opinions, and emotions, but they may have difficulty expressing them or understanding language the way they once did.

How Does It Affect Lives?

Aphasia can make everyday communication more difficult. A person may know exactly what they want to say but struggle to find the right words, understand conversations, read written information, or express their thoughts clearly. Tasks that many people take for granted—such as talking with friends, ordering at a restaurant, attending school, participating in meetings, or sending messages—may require extra time and effort.

These communication challenges can affect relationships, employment, education, and social activities. Some individuals with aphasia may feel frustrated, isolated, or misunderstood when others do not recognize that their thinking and intelligence remain intact.

Despite these challenges, many people with aphasia continue to lead active, meaningful lives. With therapy, supportive communication partners, and accessible environments, individuals with aphasia can build connections, pursue their interests, and participate in their communities. Awareness and patience from others can make a significant difference in helping people with aphasia feel included and understood.



What Does Support Look Like?

Support begins with patience and understanding. When communicating with someone who has aphasia:

- Give them extra time to express themselves.
- Speak clearly and use simple language when needed.
- Reduce distractions and focus on one topic at a time.
- Use gestures, pictures, writing, or technology to support communication.
- Listen respectfully and avoid finishing sentences unless asked.
- Remember that communication challenges do not reflect a person's intelligence or worth.

Speech-language therapy can help many people strengthen communication skills and develop new ways to connect with others. Family members, friends, educators, and community members all play an important role in creating an inclusive environment where every voice can be heard.

Did You Know?

About one-third of stroke survivors experience aphasia, yet many people have never heard of it. Raising awareness helps create more inclusive schools, workplaces, and communities.

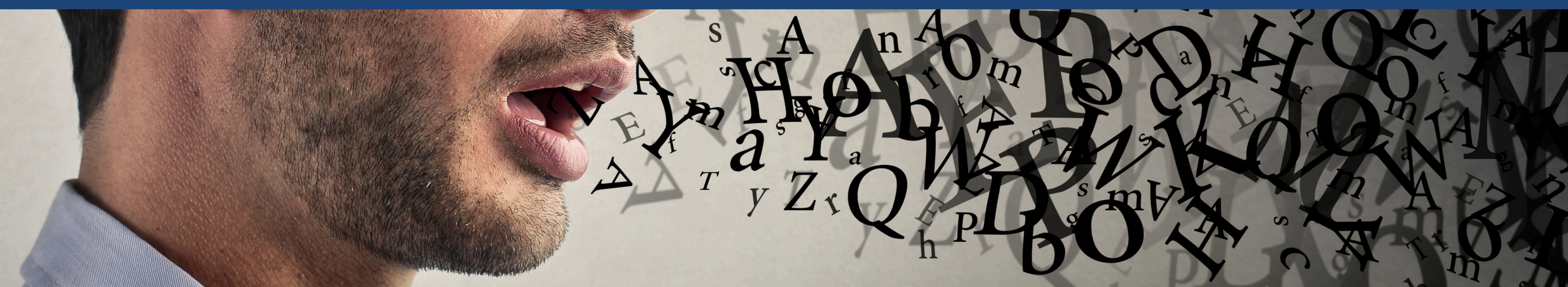
For more information about the Exceptionality of the Month: Aphasia , please research the following websites:

[Mayo Clinic](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/aphasia/symptoms-causes/syc-20369518)

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/aphasia/symptoms-causes/syc-20369518>

[National Aphasia Association](https://aphasia.org/)

<https://aphasia.org/>



IN THE SPOTLIGHT: PEOPLE THAT INSPIRE

This month, we are honored to recognize Thomas Freeman—a devoted husband, loving father, U.S. Navy Veteran, Vice President Executive Recruiter with Merrill Lynch Wealth Management at Bank of America, and a passionate advocate for the neurodiversity community.

Thomas has taken the love he has for his family, especially his son James, and allowed it to become a source of encouragement for countless other families. His advocacy is rooted not only in professional leadership but in lived experience. He understands the joys and uncertainties of raising a child with exceptionalities, and he openly shares a message of faith, hope, and perseverance with parents walking a similar journey.

Whether he is mentoring professionals, championing inclusion in the workplace, partnering with nonprofits, or serving within the neurodiversity community, Thomas leads with compassion, humility, and purpose. He is committed to creating spaces where every individual feels welcomed, valued, and has the opportunity to thrive.

One of the things that inspires us most is Thomas's willingness to encourage other parents by reminding them they are never alone. Through his unwavering faith, love for his family, and servant's heart, he continues to shine a light for families navigating the road of exceptionalities.



*Thomas Freeman
Husband, Father, Veteran &
Advocate*



Be a Beacon of Hope: Ways You Can Help

There are many ways you can help, whether you have time, resources, or simply the desire to make a difference. Every act of kindness, no matter how small, matters to the families and individuals we serve.

Volunteer: Your time and energy are a gift.

Spread the Word: Share this newsletter and help raise awareness in your community.

Donate: You can donate to our cause. Your generosity ensures that individuals with exceptionalities and their families are never left behind. When you give, you join us in building a future where families feel supported, included and empowered.

<https://www.tnf1st.org/donate>

No matter how you choose to get involved, know that you are making a direct impact on the lives of families who have often felt forgotten. You are helping us affirm the individuals and their families that they are not on this road by themselves, and their presence and their voices truly make a difference.

Operation “No One Forgotten” Pop-Up Is Coming to DeSoto!

At The Not Forgotten 1st, we know that families of individuals with exceptionalities often need more than resources—they need connection, support, next steps and a community that understands.

On Saturday, August 8, 2026, we invite you to join us for our first-ever Operation “No One Forgotten” Pop-Up, a community resource and support event created specifically for individuals with exceptionalities and their families. In partnership with the City of DeSoto, families will have the opportunity to connect with trusted organizations, ask questions, explore resources, and discover next steps in areas such as education, employment, housing, healthcare, transportation, and more.

This is more than a resource event—it is an experience designed with families in mind. We look forward to welcoming you, supporting you, and reminding you that you are not forgotten.💙



THE NOT FORGOTTEN 1st PRESENTS

OPERATION “NO ONE FORGOTTEN”
POP-UP!

A Community Resource & Support Event for
Individuals with Exceptionalities and Their Families

Join us for an empowering day designed to connect families with valuable resources, trusted professionals, and organizations that can help navigate life’s challenges and opportunities.

Resource Information Includes:

- Transportation
- Education
- Employment & Job Training
- Housing
- Healthcare (Medicaid/Medicare)
- Social Opportunities & Inclusion
- Transition to Adulthood
- Churches & Faith Inclusion
- Police & First Responders
- AI & Technology Support

Special Giveaways:

Families will have the opportunity to receive:

- Back-to-School Supplies
- Non-Perishable Food Items
- Household Essentials

Together, we are ensuring that individuals with exceptionalities and their families are seen, heard, supported, and reminded that they are not forgotten.

Sponsored By
The City of DeSoto



REGISTER TODAY!



Scan the QR Code to register.

Monetary Donations: tnf1st.org/pop-up-donation

Donate Giveaway Items: To donate back-to-school supplies, non-perishable food items, or household essentials, please email cdawson@tnf1st.org.

Date: Saturday, August 8, 2026
Time: 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Location:
City of DeSoto Town Center
211 E. Pleasant Run Road
DeSoto, TX 75115
(Free Parking)

“We see you. We hear you. And we are here. You are not forgotten.”

Summer Highlights

This summer has been a season of building relationships, strengthening partnerships, and preparing for what lies ahead. Every meeting, tour, and conversation has reinforced our commitment to ensuring that individuals with exceptionalities and their families have greater access to the resources, opportunities, and support they deserve. As we continue growing our network, we are reminded that lasting change begins when communities come together with a shared purpose.

Bank of America Support Services Tour

Our visit to Bank of America Support Services was both inspiring and eye-opening. We had the opportunity to see firsthand how an inclusive workplace can empower individuals of all abilities while fostering a culture where everyone has the opportunity to contribute and succeed. Beyond learning about their innovative employment model, we built meaningful relationships with leaders who share our passion for creating pathways to employment. The experience reinforced our belief that meaningful work changes lives, and we look forward to exploring future opportunities that will help connect the families we serve with inclusive career possibilities.



Operation “No One Forgotten” Pop-Up Planning Meeting

As we prepare for our inaugural Operation “No One Forgotten” Pop-Up, our planning meeting brought together an incredible team of passionate advocates, community leaders, and partners committed to making this event unlike any traditional resource fair. Together, we focused on creating an experience where families will receive answers, build meaningful connections, and leave with practical next steps—not just brochures. Every detail, from the resource areas to the family experience, reflects our mission to ensure that no individual or family feels overlooked as we work to bring hope, guidance, and lasting support to the communities we serve.



Summer Highlights

We are also deeply grateful for the many opportunities to engage with our community this summer—from the **North Texas Disability Chamber's Annual Business & Nonprofit Reception**, to the **Chill Act Expo (Dallas)**, **The Arc of Texas Tour Across Texas**, **My Possibilities' Pathways & Possibilities: Accessibility Coaching & Planning Support**, and **Hank's Friends' Ability Skateboarding & Resource Fair**.



Every event reminded us why we do this work. Each conversation, connection, and new partnership deepened our commitment to walking alongside families, listening to their needs, and helping build a community where individuals with exceptionalities and their families feel seen, understood, welcomed, and equipped with the resources they need to move forward with confidence and hope.

Community Events

13
JUL



WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS
NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS

A proud partner of the AmericanJobCenter® network

Summer Workforce HireAbility Program

📅 Mon, Jul 13 - Tue, Jul 14, 2026

🕒 9:00am-3:00pm

📍 McKinney Workforce Center

<https://dfwjobs.jotform.com/261315535848866>

Cleburne Workforce Center
June 29- June 30
Denton Workforce Center
July 7 - July 8
McKinney Workforce Center
July 13 - July 14

[Click Link for Pre-Registration Form](#)

24
JUL



FRISCO

Play For All Sensory Swim

📅 Friday, July 24, 2026

🕒 10:00am-11:30am

📍 5828 Nancy Jane Lane Frisco, TX 75035

<https://www.friscotexas.gov/Calendar.aspx?EID=7347>

July 24 from 10 - 11:30 a.m.
August 1 from 10 - 11:30 a.m.

[Click Link for More Information](#)

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AUG



the not
Forgotten, 1st

Operation “No One Forgotten” Pop-Up

📅 Saturday, August 8, 2026

🕒 10:00am-2:00pm

📍 City of DeSoto Town Center | 211 E Pleasant Run Road DeSoto, Texas 75115

<https://www.tnflst.org/pop-up-registration-form>

More than a resource fair—Operation “No One Forgotten” is a place where individuals with exceptionalities and their families can find answers, resources, encouragement, and hope.

[Click Link to Register](#)

Awareness Month

As we continue forward, we recognize the awareness observances that bring attention to the lives, challenges, and strengths within the exceptionalities community. These moments offer an opportunity to deepen our understanding and to move with intention—choosing empathy, choosing inclusion, and choosing to stand alongside families in ways that truly matter. Each observance is a reminder that when we grow in awareness, we also grow in our ability to care well.



For May:

Williams Syndrome Awareness Month

May is Williams Syndrome Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness of a rare genetic condition that affects approximately 1 in 7,500 to 10,000 people. Individuals with Williams Syndrome often have unique strengths, including strong verbal abilities and outgoing personalities, while also experiencing developmental, learning, and medical challenges. Increased awareness helps foster understanding, acceptance, and support for individuals and families impacted by Williams Syndrome.

Celiac Disease Awareness Month

Celiac Disease Awareness Month shines a light on an autoimmune condition in which consuming gluten damages the small intestine and can affect overall health. Celiac disease impacts both children and adults, many of whom remain undiagnosed for years. Raising awareness encourages early diagnosis, access to proper treatment, and greater understanding of the challenges faced by individuals living with this condition.



For June:

Juneteenth

Juneteenth, observed on June 19, commemorates the day in 1865 when enslaved African Americans in Texas learned of their freedom, more than two years after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued. This important day honors the resilience, strength, and contributions of African Americans throughout history. Juneteenth serves as a reminder of the importance of freedom, equality, and creating communities where everyone is valued and included.

Alzheimer’s & Brain Awareness Month

Alzheimer’s & Brain Awareness Month brings attention to Alzheimer’s disease and other conditions that affect brain health, memory, and cognitive function. Millions of individuals, caregivers, and families are impacted by Alzheimer’s disease worldwide. This awareness month encourages education, early detection, support for those affected, and continued research aimed at improving treatments and finding a cure.



Always Here For You

Hello Friend,

As Father's Day has now passed, I've found myself reflecting on the incredible men who quietly carry so much. So often, when we talk about raising a child with exceptionalities, the spotlight naturally falls on mothers. We talk about the appointments they attend, the therapies they coordinate, the advocacy they lead, and the countless hats they wear. And while those conversations are important, today I want to pause and recognize another group whose love often speaks more through actions than words.

The fathers.

I have had the privilege of watching one father in particular, my husband, Marcus. When our son, Callie, was diagnosed with autism at the age of three, Marcus was faced with something he had never expected. Like so many fathers, he didn't fully understand the diagnosis. He didn't know what autism would mean for our son or for our family. He wasn't always sure how to connect with Callie or navigate a world that suddenly felt unfamiliar. But there was one thing he never questioned—his love for his son. It reached far beyond anything he couldn't understand.



Over the years, I've watched Marcus step into the trenches with Callie. I've watched him advocate when words were hard to find. I've watched him protect, encourage, teach, celebrate victories that others might overlook, and stand beside our son through challenges that few people ever see. His relationship with Callie wasn't built on having all the answers—it was built on showing up, over and over again.

And Marcus isn't alone. There are fathers reading this who have sacrificed quietly. Fathers who have worked long hours while still making time for therapies and school meetings. Fathers who have carried worries they rarely put into words. Fathers who have learned entirely new ways to communicate, connect, and celebrate their children.

To every father raising a child with exceptionalities, I want you to know this:

Your presence matters. Your voice matters. Your consistency matters. The late nights, the long drives, the countless prayers, the quiet sacrifices, the moments no one applauds—they matter.

Thank you for standing in the gap.

Thank you for choosing to learn when life handed you something unfamiliar.

Thank you for refusing to give up.

My prayer is that every father will be reminded that his efforts are seen, his sacrifices are appreciated, and his love is making a difference every single day.

And from this grateful Mom to so many incredible fathers...

Thank you.

Always here for you,

Portia

“Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love.” — 1 Corinthians 16:13–14

Thank you for reading!

THE NOT FORGOTTEN 1ST
214-937-4891
WWW.TNF1ST.ORG
CONTACT@TNF1ST.ORG

