



Hope Lives Here

Newsletter
February 2026

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Rooted in Love

A New Season of Purpose, Connection, and Commitment

As we begin a new year, we are reminded that love is not simply a feeling — it is a foundation. It anchors families in uncertain moments, fuels advocacy when the road feels long, and calls communities to move toward one another with intention. Love is action. It stays. It strengthens. It builds. This year, we begin rooted.

Where Growth Begins

Growth often starts quietly. For individuals with exceptionalities, progress may unfold differently than expected. It may require more patience, more creativity, or more time. But growth is not measured by comparison — it is measured by movement. As a new year begins, we lean into the work of cultivating environments where growth is nurtured with understanding and supported with unshakeable commitment.

Strengthening the Circle

Support grows when people link arms — educators, therapists, advocates, neighbors, and friends — choosing to walk alongside one another. When the circle around an individual is steady and informed, it changes what is possible. Community does not remove every challenge, but it ensures that challenges are not faced in isolation.

Advocacy That Endures

Advocacy is not loud for the sake of noise. It is persistent because it must be. It shows up in meetings, in phone calls, in research late at night. It asks for clarity. It asks for fairness. It asks for access. As we step into this year, we continue pressing forward — not out of frustration alone, but out of deep conviction that every individual deserves opportunity.

Seeing Ability Clearly

When we slow down and truly look, we begin to see strength where others may overlook it. Ability is expressed in connection and in determination. It may not always follow conventional expectations, but it is there — constant and real. Honoring ability means recognizing worth without conditions.

Growing Forward

A new year is not about grand declarations. It is about continuing. Continuing to show up. Continuing to learn. Continuing to make space. And together, we move forward — rooted in love, grounded in purpose, and committed to building pathways that expand possibility for every life in our community.



Exceptionality of the Month: Rett Syndrome

Rett Syndrome is a rare genetic neurological and developmental disorder that primarily affects girls. It is caused by a change (mutation) in a gene called MECP2, which plays a critical role in brain development and how nerve cells communicate with one another.

Most children with Rett Syndrome appear to develop typically during the first 6–18 months of life. Then, there is a gradual loss of previously learned skills, such as speaking, crawling, walking, or purposeful hand use. Rett Syndrome is usually not inherited; in most cases, the genetic change happens spontaneously.

Rett Syndrome is lifelong and complex, affecting multiple systems of the body — but individuals with Rett Syndrome continue to think, feel, connect, and engage in meaningful ways.

How It Affects Lives

Rett Syndrome affects each individual differently but commonly impacts communication, movement, and overall health.

Many individuals lose spoken language, though understanding and awareness often remain strong. Purposeful hand use may be replaced with repetitive movements, and walking or balance can become difficult.

Health challenges may include seizures, breathing irregularities, scoliosis, sleep disturbances, and feeding difficulties. Because of these complexities, individuals often require ongoing support with daily living activities.

Despite these challenges, many individuals with Rett Syndrome demonstrate deep emotional connection and engagement with those around them.



What Support Looks Like

There is currently no cure for Rett Syndrome, so support focuses on improving quality of life, health, communication, and independence.

Care often includes physical, occupational, and speech therapy — sometimes incorporating alternative communication methods. Medical management may address seizures, nutrition, scoliosis, and breathing concerns.

Educational supports such as IEPs, adaptive equipment, and assistive technology help ensure meaningful access to learning. Family and community supports, including respite care and long-term planning, are also essential.

Effective support builds a strong network around the individual, helping remove barriers and expand opportunities throughout life.

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

[International Rett Syndrome Foundation](https://www.rettsyndrome.org/about-rett-syndrome/understanding-rett-syndrome/)

<https://www.rettsyndrome.org/about-rett-syndrome/understanding-rett-syndrome/>

[Mayo Clinic](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rett-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20377227)

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rett-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20377227>

[National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke \(NINDS\)](https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/rett-syndrome)

<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/rett-syndrome>

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: PEOPLE THAT INSPIRE



Linda Bonner

There are some people who don't just advocate — they walk it, live it, and then reach back to bring others with them. Ms. Linda Bonner is one of those people.

As a mother, advocate, and author of *Blessed with Extraordinary*, Ms. Linda took her personal journey of raising a son with Down syndrome and turned it into a lifeline for other families. What began in uncertainty and learning became something powerful — a resource filled with practical guidance, shared language, and encouragement for families navigating diagnosis, school years, adulthood, and everything in between.

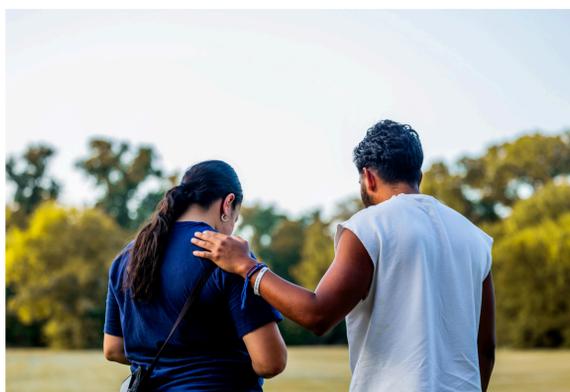
But Ms. Linda's impact goes beyond a book.

She is deeply committed to helping families feel seen, supported, and equipped. She speaks openly about dignity and belonging — not as buzzwords, but as lived values. Through her advocacy, speaking, writing, and even her creative work, she reminds communities that inclusion begins with understanding and grows through intentional action.

What makes Ms. Linda inspiring is her heart. She doesn't just want families to survive the journey — she wants them to thrive within it. She believes creativity can open doors for advocacy, and that service is how belonging takes shape.

Ms. Linda's life is a beautiful example of what happens when personal experience becomes purpose — and when one family's story becomes hope for many others.

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.

New Year's Highlights

The start of this year has already been marked by meaningful conversations, powerful partnerships, and intentional steps forward as we continue advocating for individuals with exceptionalities and their families across North Texas.

TNF1st Strategy (Hack-A-Thon) Meeting

The Not Forgotten 1st gathered community leaders, advocates, and nonprofit partners for our Strategy (Hack-A-Thon) Meeting — an intentional space to move from challenge to change. Together, we identified real barriers impacting individuals with exceptionalities and their families and began shaping collaborative solutions rooted in access, dignity, and belonging. The evening reminded us that lasting change happens when we sit at the table together and commit to action.



Pioneering Excellence MLK Scholarship Gala

We were honored to attend and be a part of the Pioneering Excellence MLK Scholarship Gala, an inspiring evening celebrating leadership, education, and service in the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A particularly meaningful moment was witnessing two deserving students with exceptionalities receive scholarships — a powerful reminder that ability, determination, and promise deserve to be recognized and invested in. The night beautifully reflected what happens when opportunity and inclusion meet.

New Year's Highlights

We were also blessed with invitations to tour facilities that are doing remarkable work for individuals with exceptionalities. Walking through these spaces and seeing the care and intentionality behind every program truly moved us. It was a powerful reminder that when communities invest with compassion, lives are changed.

- 29 Acres Tour
- Dominique CARES Tour
- St. Timothy Christian Academy Tour
- Envision Dallas Tour



Additional events we were grateful to attend include:

- WITH Ministries Worship As One Accessibility Summit
- North Texas Disability Chamber's Annual Meeting & Inaugural Hall of Fame
- Valentine's Day Card-Making and Networking Workshop
- The Arc of DFW Area's ACE Workshop



Community Events

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Dallas Public LIBRARY

Sensory Storytime

📅 Friday, March 6, 2026
🕒 10:30am-11:30am
📍 Fretz Park Branch Library | 6990 Belt Line Road
Dallas, TX 75254
🌐 dallaslibrary.librarymarket.com

Get ready to read in a sensory-friendly environment! Sensory Storytime has songs, stories and playtime tailored to meet the needs of children who need a calmer environment. Spaces are limited, and tickets for Sensory Storytime are available on a first-come, first-serve basis to ensure everyone has a good time. Suggested ages: Kindergarten-Grade 12
Please note: our Storytime presenters are not Special Needs educators
Click link for more Information

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THE BLACK CADDIE

Kam and Friends Miniature Golf Outing

📅 Saturday, March 21, 2026
🕒 8:00am-12:00pm
📍 PopStroke | 5770 Grandscape Boulevard The Colony, TX 75056
🌐 www.eventbrite.com

Celebrate National Down Syndrome Day with Kam & Friends Mini Golf Outing presented by Black Caddie Academy. Sign up and Join Us! This tournament is specifically for children ages 9-18 with Down Syndrome and Autism.
Click link for Ticket Information

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MY POSSIBILITIES
LEARN LIVE GROW

Night to Soar Community Ball

📅 Saturday, March 28, 2026
🕒 6:00pm-10:00pm
📍 300 Reunion Blvd. Dallas, TX 75027
🌐 mypossibilities.org

Click link to Purchase Tickets

Awareness Month

As we step further into this year, we pause to recognize the awareness observances that call us to deeper understanding and meaningful action. These moments are more than dates on a calendar — they are opportunities to listen more closely, learn more intentionally, and stand more boldly alongside individuals with exceptionalities and their families. Awareness invites us not only to see, but to respond with compassion and commitment.

For January:

National Braille Literacy Month

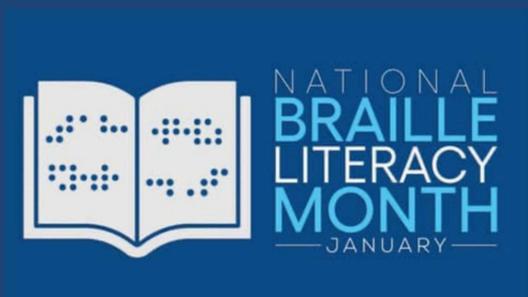
National Braille Literacy Month highlights the importance of Braille as a reading and writing system for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, supporting literacy, independence, and full access to education and employment. This observance brings attention to the critical need for accessible materials and reminds us that literacy is a gateway to opportunity, dignity, and self-determination.

National Birth Defects Awareness Month

National Birth Defects Awareness Month raises awareness of structural or functional conditions present at birth that can affect physical development, learning, or overall health, often requiring specialized medical care and long-term support. This month encourages education, early intervention, research, and community support while honoring the strength of individuals and families navigating these diagnoses.

Moebius Syndrome Awareness Day

Moebius Syndrome is a rare neurological condition present at birth that primarily affects facial muscles, limiting facial expression and eye movement, and sometimes impacting speech, feeding, and motor development. Moebius Syndrome Awareness Day brings visibility to individuals living with this rare diagnosis, promotes understanding beyond outward appearance, and fosters greater inclusion and acceptance.

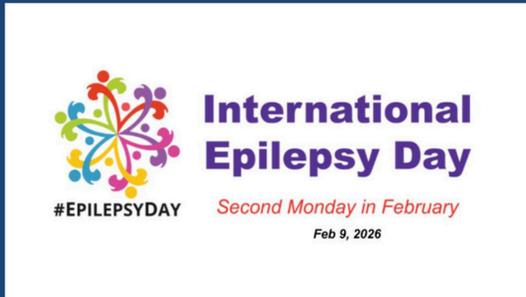


Awareness Month

For February:

Low Vision Awareness Month

Low vision refers to a visual impairment that cannot be fully corrected with glasses, contact lenses, medication, or surgery and can significantly impact reading, driving, recognizing faces, and daily independence. Low Vision Awareness Month highlights the importance of early detection, vision rehabilitation services, assistive technology, and accessibility to help individuals live full and empowered lives.



International Epilepsy Day

Epilepsy is a neurological condition characterized by recurring, unprovoked seizures that can vary in type and severity and may affect safety, learning, employment, and overall quality of life. International Epilepsy Day raises global awareness, reduces stigma, and promotes education, treatment access, and support for individuals and families impacted by epilepsy.

Turner Syndrome Awareness Month

Turner Syndrome is a genetic condition affecting females, caused by the partial or complete absence of one X chromosome, and may impact growth, heart health, fertility, and learning. Turner Syndrome Awareness Month promotes early diagnosis, specialized medical care, and greater understanding of the unique strengths and challenges experienced by those with this condition.



Black History Month

Black History Month honors the achievements, contributions, and lived experiences of Black people throughout history, including those within the exceptional community whose stories are often underrepresented. This month brings attention to cultural impact, resilience, and the importance of equity and inclusion across all spaces.



JDAIM Disability Awareness Month

Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM) promotes meaningful inclusion of individuals with disabilities within Jewish communities and beyond. This observance encourages belonging, accessibility, and the recognition of every person's inherent dignity and value.

International Angelman Day

Angelman Syndrome is a rare genetic neurological disorder that affects speech, balance, intellectual development, and may include seizures and sleep challenges. International Angelman Day raises awareness, supports research efforts, and celebrates the joyful spirit and resilience of individuals living with this diagnosis.



World Encephalitis Day

Encephalitis is inflammation of the brain, often caused by infection or autoimmune response, and can lead to seizures, memory loss, physical disability, or long-term neurological challenges. World Encephalitis Day increases awareness of symptoms, promotes early diagnosis and treatment, and supports survivors and their families in their recovery journey.

Always Here For You



Hello Friend,

I have been thinking about our families and their well-being a lot lately, especially when the world feels heavier than before. Our days are often swallowed up in whatever the present hour demands, and our nights are filled with unanswered questions: How much more? And how much longer? What will tomorrow look like? The future holds secrets that we want revealed today. And when there is no reveal, fear and worry remain unpacked in the pits of our being, unbothered.

So what do we do when uncertainty meets us at every turn — when there seems to be more than we can hold, more than we can fix, more than we can fully understand?

My go-to is prayer. And in addition to praying, these are the pillars I lean into:

****1. Anchor in your support network.**

Reach out to trusted friends, family, faith communities, and support organizations. You were never meant to journey alone.

****2. Name what you can control.**

Instead of trying to figure out life's question marks, focus on small, meaningful actions today, like routines, therapy goals, self-care moments, or conversations. And remember, sometimes the control is not in your hands.

****3. Practice presence, not perfection.**

Some days will be harder than the norm, and that's okay. Extend yourself grace and celebrate progress; even the tiniest steps forward matter.

****4. Lean into spiritual strength.**

Prayer, scripture, and moments of quiet reflection can remind us that while we may not know the path ahead, God is the ultimate Shepherd.

****5. Choose hope.**

Hope isn't denial of difficulty — it's courage in the face of it. Hope empowers us to keep walking, keep believing in spite of what is seen or not seen and keep living with purpose.

No matter where you find yourself — weary, afraid, hopeful, or somewhere in between — please know you are not alone. Every journey is unique, and every family's walk looks different.

May you give yourself permission to exhale what you cannot control, and breathe in what is still possible. My hope and prayer is that in the steps you take today — however small they may feel — you discover renewed comfort, fresh resilience, and the reminder that community is walking with you.

Always here for you,

Portia

“Be strong and of good courage. Do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One Who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.” (Deuteronomy 31:6)

Thank you for reading!

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