

the not Forgotten, 1st

Hope Lives Here

Newsletter

October 2026

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Finding Comfort in Every Season

As the summer heat begins to fade and the cooler days of autumn settle in, there's something comforting about the changing season. And for individuals with exceptionalities and their families, comfort can mean so much more. It may be found in a familiar routine, a quiet space after an overwhelming day, a reassuring voice, or simply being surrounded by people who understand and accept them just as they are.

Life brings its share of responsibilities, challenges, and unexpected moments. But in the midst of it all, everyone deserves opportunities to feel safe, supported, connected, and loved.

Comfort Looks Different for Everyone
What brings peace to one person may feel overwhelming to another. For some, comfort is found in music, movement, or being outdoors. For others, it's a quiet room, a favorite object, or time alone.

Understanding and respecting these differences helps create environments where individuals feel secure and valued. Comfort isn't about making everyone fit into the same space. It's about making space for everyone.

Caring for Those Who Care
Behind so many individuals with exceptionalities are parents, siblings, caregivers, and loved ones who give so much of themselves. Their days may be filled with responsibilities and making sure everyone else's needs are met.

But caregivers need comfort, too. A moment of rest, a listening ear, a helping hand, or simply being reminded that they weren't meant to carry everything alone - can make a difference. Their well-being matters and is crucial just as much as the people they care for.

Making Room for Joy
Life is about more than schedules and appointments. It's also about laughter, friendships, experiences, and making memories.

A fall festival, a favorite movie, a walk through the park, or a quiet evening together can bring moments of happiness. Joy doesn't have to be extravagant or look the same for everyone. Sometimes the smallest moments become the ones we treasure most.

The Comfort of Community
There is something powerful about being surrounded by people who understand your journey. Families who share similar experiences, friends who embrace differences, and communities that welcome everyone create a sense of belonging.

No family should feel they have to walk their journey alone. When we extend compassion and show up for one another, we create communities where individuals and families feel seen and heard.

Comfort Through Every Season
As autumn reminds us that seasons change, may we also remember that life brings different seasons of its own. And whatever season you and your family may be experiencing, remember that you deserve moments of peace, opportunities for joy, meaningful connections, and people who walk alongside you.

Because comfort isn't always found in a place or a season. Sometimes, it's found in knowing that you are understood, you belong, and you are not forgotten.



Exceptionality of the Month: Narcolepsy



What Is Narcolepsy?

Narcolepsy is a chronic neurological sleep disorder that affects the brain's ability to regulate sleep and wakefulness. Individuals experience excessive daytime sleepiness and may suddenly feel an overwhelming need to sleep, even after a full night's rest.

Narcolepsy can affect children and adults and often begins during childhood, adolescence, or young adulthood. There are two main types:

- **Type 1:** Often involves cataplexy, a sudden loss of muscle strength triggered by emotions such as laughter or excitement. It is associated with low levels of hypocretin, a brain chemical that regulates wakefulness.
- **Type 2:** Involves excessive daytime sleepiness without cataplexy.

Other symptoms may include sleep paralysis, vivid dreamlike experiences, disrupted nighttime sleep, and difficulty concentrating. Although there is no cure, medical treatment and supportive routines can help individuals manage symptoms and live fulfilling lives.

How Does It Affect Lives?

Narcolepsy can affect education, employment, relationships, independence, and everyday activities. Individuals may struggle to stay awake during school, work, conversations, or social gatherings. Difficulty concentrating, memory challenges, and unpredictable sleep episodes can make daily responsibilities more demanding.

Children may be mistakenly labeled as lazy, distracted, or unmotivated, while adults may struggle with workplace expectations, or maintaining social connections. These challenges can also contribute to frustration, anxiety, depression, or isolation.

Families often play an important role in coordinating medical care, advocating for accommodations, and providing emotional support. With proper treatment, individuals with narcolepsy can pursue their goals and participate meaningfully in their communities.

What Does Support Look Like?

Supporting someone with narcolepsy begins with patience, understanding, and recognizing that their symptoms are not a choice. Helpful support can include:

- Educating others to reduce stigma and misunderstandings.
- Allowing scheduled naps and rest breaks when needed.
- Providing school accommodations through a 504 Plan or IEP when appropriate.
- Offering workplace flexibility and reasonable accommodations.
- Encouraging consistent sleep routines and medical follow-up.
- Creating safe environments, especially during activities involving driving or machinery.
- Providing emotional support and access to counseling when needed.
- Connecting families with support groups and community resources.

Healthcare providers, educators, employers, and families all play an important role in helping individuals with narcolepsy feel understood, included, and supported.

Did You Know?

People with narcolepsy can experience disrupted sleep at night despite feeling extremely sleepy during the day. Narcolepsy is not simply about sleeping too much; it is a neurological condition that affects the brain's ability to regulate sleep and wakefulness.

Narcolepsy can also go undiagnosed for years because symptoms are sometimes mistaken for ADHD, depression, or poor sleeping habits. Greater awareness can lead to earlier diagnosis, appropriate treatment, and stronger support.



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

Cleveland Clinic
https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/12147-narcolepsy

Harvard Health Publishing
https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/narcolepsy-a-to-z

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: PEOPLE THAT INSPIRE



Clay Boatright

Some individuals become advocates because they recognize a need. Others become advocates because they live that need every day. Clay Boatright is someone whose journey as a father has shaped a lifetime of advocacy, compassion, and dedication to individuals with exceptionalities/disabilities and their families.

Clay and his wife, Carole, raised three daughters, including identical twins, Paige and Mia, who have profound autism and significant intellectual disabilities. As a father, Clay experienced firsthand the challenges, joys, and realities of raising children with exceptionalities. Those experiences inspired him to become a voice for families navigating similar journeys.

For nearly two decades, Clay balanced a professional career with his passion for disability advocacy. His dedication led him to serve on numerous health and education advisory committees, including an appointment by President Barack Obama to the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities. His knowledge and lived experiences have made him a trusted voice among families, legislators, nonprofit organizations, and community leaders.

But beyond his accomplishments, it is Clay's perspective on fatherhood that truly inspires. He continues to embrace life with faith, purpose, and gratitude. He treasures the simple moments spent with Paige and Mia, reminding us that love doesn't always require a lot. Sometimes, simply being together is enough.

Clay's journey shows us that while life may bring unexpected challenges, it can also bring extraordinary love, purpose, and joy. His belief that happiness can still be a choice, even during life's most difficult moments, offers a beautiful message of encouragement to families—that their journeys matter and that hope can remain present through it all.







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.

THE NOT FORGOTTEN 1st PRESENTS

OPERATION "NO ONE FORGOTTEN" POP-UP

Dallas

A COMMUNITY RESOURCE & SUPPORT EVENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES/DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES





SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2026

10:00 A.M. - 2:00 P.M.

RESOURCES FOR:

TRANSPORTATION, EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT & JOB TRAINING, HOUSING, HEALTHCARE (MEDICAID/MEDICARE), TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD AND SO MUCH MORE!

INTERNATIONAL LINGUISTICS CENTER
(EVENT CENTER)
7500 W CAMP WISDOM ROAD
DALLAS, TEXAS 75236

PARTNERS

Minnie's Food Pantry

SEASONS OF CHANGE INC.
ENLIGHTENING MINDS. TRANSFORMING LIVES.

BERRY FAMILY SERVICES
Meeting the Needs of the Disabled and Their Families

SPECIAL GIVEAWAYS:

- NON-PERISHABLE FOODS
- HOUSEHOLD ESSENTIALS
- TOYS
- SOCKS

SCAN QR CODE OR GO TO WWW.TNF1ST.ORG TO REGISTER!

MONETARY DONATIONS: TNF1ST.ORG/POP-UP-DONATION

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

Fall Highlights

This fall has been filled with meaningful connections, celebrations, and opportunities to witness the incredible work being done throughout our community. From honoring the gifts and abilities of individuals with exceptionalities to celebrating stories that inspire hope and understanding, each experience has reminded us of the power of inclusion, advocacy, and community. We are grateful for the individuals and organizations whose hearts and missions continue to make a difference in the lives of the families we serve.

The Potter's House Capable Minds, Hearts & Hands 8th Annual Sneaker Ball

What an incredible celebration of love, joy, and inclusion! Hosted by Dr. Demetrice Smith and her dedicated team, the 8th Annual Sneaker Ball was an unforgettable evening centered around the "Buddies" and their families. From the music and dancing to the fashion show, games, and fellowship, every detail was thoughtfully planned to celebrate their unique gifts and abilities. It was heartwarming to witness the joy on their faces and the love poured into creating a beautiful experience where the Buddies were truly the stars of the celebration. We applaud Dr. Smith and her team for their continued dedication to this exceptional community!









LaTonya Ordaz's Book Signing – *Ziya Girl, We're Waiting on Your Voice*

We had the pleasure of attending LaTonya Ordaz's book signing at the DeSoto Public Library, celebrating her book, Ziya Girl, We're Waiting on Your Voice. Through her heartfelt storytelling, LaTonya shares a journey that speaks to the love, patience, hope, and advocacy that so many families raising children with exceptionalities understand. Her story is a beautiful reflection of a mother's love and the importance of embracing each child's unique journey. We celebrate LaTonya for sharing her family's story and helping other families know they are not alone.





Fall Highlights

We are also deeply grateful for the many opportunities to engage with our community this Fall—from the **Catch A Ride's** "North Texas Transportation Insecurity Summit" to **Patient Advocate Foundation's** "Dallas Community Roundtable", **MIC's** "Inclusion Employment & Resource Fair", **Workforce Solutions North Central Texas'** "Parenting with Purpose & Power", **Esperanza Community Center's** Ribbon Cutting & Open House**, Dominique CARES'** "Black Tie Sneaker Ball", **Building Bridges'** "Special Education Symposium & Resource Fair", **North Texas Disability Chamber's** "Community Connections", **The Arc of DFW's** "Putts for Progress", **United Rocks'** "Rise Together:The Next Ascent Brunch", **Texas Health's** "Community Wellness Connect Session", **Bridges to Bright Futures'** "Region 11 Family & Community Symposium", **Silent Voyces'** "High 5 Hope Fun Run & Walk", Tour of the **Hot Spot Studio**, **North Texas Disability Chamber's** "Awards Luncheon" and **Children's Hunger Fund** (Volunteer in Dallas-Frisco).

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

14 NOV

The A Look Ahead Conference Series

Saturday, November 14, 2026
9:00am-2:30pm
313 N. Center Street, Arlington, TX 76011
alookaheadseries.com

The A Look Ahead Conference Series brings together expert speakers for training focused on improving the lives of individuals with disabilities, the people who support them, and the community at large. Topics will vary quarterly. Conference participants will leave with information and resources they can use now and in the future.

Conference Fee: $20 (lunch included)
Questions: ALookAhead@thearcofdfw.org
Click link to Register

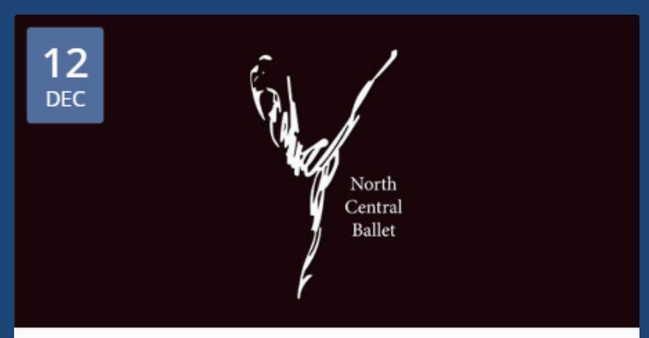
20 NOV

STCA Resource Fair

Friday, November 20, 2026
9:30am-11:30am
STCA main lobby | 6801 W. Park Blvd. Plano, TX 75093
https://www.staplano.org/

Anyone who needs to find services for a child or young adult with learning disabilities is invited to attend free of charge! We will have around 30 resource providers onsite to share about their services for this community.

12 DEC



The Nutcracker: A Welcoming Performance

Saturday, December 12, 2026
7:00pm
IM Terrell Performing Arts Center, Fort Worth
https://www.northcentralballet.com/SENSORY-FRIENDLY-NUTCRACKER/

A joyful, inclusive ballet experience for individuals and families who benefit from a more flexible theater environment.

Tickets: $10* per person · General Admission
(*plus applicable taxes and online ticketing fees)

Click link for tickets and for more information

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 September:

Craniofacial Acceptance Month

September is Craniofacial Acceptance Month, a time to raise awareness, promote understanding, and celebrate individuals born with or who develop differences in the shape or structure of their head and face. Craniofacial conditions may affect appearance, speech, hearing, breathing, and other aspects of daily life. Individuals and families may face medical challenges, social barriers, and misconceptions. This month encourages acceptance beyond physical appearance while recognizing the strength and resilience of those living with craniofacial differences.

Muscular Dystrophy Awareness Month

September is also Muscular Dystrophy Awareness Month, dedicated to increasing understanding of a group of genetic conditions that cause progressive muscle weakness and loss of muscle function. Muscular dystrophy can affect individuals differently, impacting mobility, breathing, heart function, and the ability to perform everyday activities. Advances in research, treatments, and supportive therapies continue to improve care and quality of life. This month highlights the importance of early diagnosis, accessible healthcare, and support for individuals and their families.

For October:

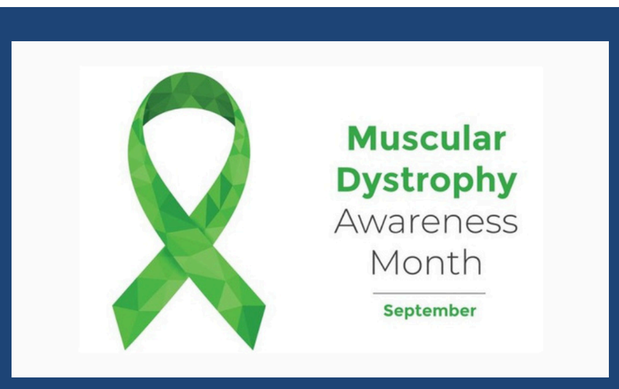
Blindness Awareness Month

October is Blindness Awareness Month, a time to increase understanding of blindness and visual impairments while promoting accessibility, independence, and inclusion. Individuals who are blind or have low vision may experience challenges in education, employment, transportation, and navigating everyday environments. However, with appropriate accommodations, assistive technology, orientation and mobility training, and accessible resources, individuals can thrive in all areas of life.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)

Observed each October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) celebrates the contributions, talents, and accomplishments of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. It also raises awareness about the importance of inclusive employment practices and equal opportunities for individuals of all abilities. Many individuals with exceptionalities/disabilities face barriers to meaningful employment, including limited job opportunities, inadequate accommodations, and misconceptions about their capabilities. NDEAM encourages employers and communities to recognize the value of a diverse workforce and create environments where everyone has the opportunity to contribute, grow, and succeed.









Always Here For You

Hello Friend,

Have you ever found yourself in a season of life when you just needed someone?

Not necessarily someone to fix everything. Not someone who had all the answers. But someone who would simply show up.

For families raising children or caring for loved ones with exceptionalities, those moments can come more often than people realize. There are appointments to schedule, services to research, paperwork to complete, decisions to make, and battles to fight. There are questions about education, healthcare, employment, housing, and what the future may hold. And sometimes, there are more questions than answers. Even the strongest parent, guardian, or caregiver can find themselves exhausted, or simply unsure of what to do next. And that is when someone standing in the gap can make all the difference.

What does standing in the gap look like?



Sometimes, it's helping a family understand resources they didn't even know existed. It's taking the extra time to help them find safe, reliable respite care so they can get a much-needed break. It's helping a parent understand their child's rights and what questions to ask or what to advocate for.

Sometimes, it's making one more phone call, researching one more resource, or connecting a family with someone who can help when they have reached a dead end.

But sometimes, standing in the gap has nothing to do with resources at all. Sometimes, it's being a listening ear when a parent needs to vent without being judged. It's being a shoulder to cry on when the weight of everything becomes too much. It's offering a hug when words just aren't enough. It's checking on someone and genuinely wanting to know how they are doing. And sometimes, it's simply saying, "I don't have all the answers, but I'm here, and we will figure this out together."

You see, standing in the gap doesn't always mean doing something big. Sometimes, the smallest acts of kindness become the very things that help someone make it through another day.

This is why I believe we need one another. We were never meant to walk through every season of life alone. There will be times when we need someone to stand in the gap for us, and there will be times when we have the opportunity to stand in the gap for someone else.

And friend, you don't have to be an expert. You don't have to know everything about disabilities, services, or resources. You just have to care enough to be present, to learn, to listen, and to help where you can. Because sometimes, what a family needs most is to know they have not been forgotten.

So, I want to leave you with a little encouragement. If you know a family who may be struggling, reach out. Don't always wait for them to ask for help. Offer your time. Share a resource. Make a phone call. Be an advocate. Pray with them. Give them a hug. Or simply sit beside them and listen.

And if you are the one who needs someone to stand in the gap for you, please know that it is okay to ask for help. You do not have to carry the world on your shoulders by yourself. We all need somebody sometimes.

My prayer is that we continue to build a community where standing in the gap for one another isn't something extraordinary, but simply what we do because we care. Because when we stand in the gap for one another, we remind each other that no one has to walk their journey alone.

Always here for you,

Portia
"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." — Galatians 6:2 (NKJV)

Thank you for reading!

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