



# The NOODLE

Open up and say AHHHH!!!



Volume 16, Issue 13

June, 2024

**W**elcome to the June 2024 edition of *The Noodle*, written and published by members of The Florida Youth Council! For this special issue of *The Noodle*, members of the FYC wrote about the importance of being an advocate. We hope you enjoy learning about our experiences and our thoughts and opinions in this edition of *The Noodle*!

### Current Members:

*Viv Banks*

*Jakel Baker*

*John Howard Baldino*

*Shevie Barnes*

*Derek Carraway*

*Sky Tristian Elliot*

*Alexander Gonzalez*

*Leah Gorman*

*Morgan Griffin*

*JJ Humphrey*

*Tamara Koren*

*James Kuhlman*

*Vanessa Muniz-Pellicer*

*Chelle Sandiford*

*Josue Tapia*

*Lilibeth Vega*

*Christina Waldron*

*Serena Wetmore*



### From The Advisors' Desk

Do you know what it means to advocate? Have you ever had to fight for something that you saw was wrong? Maybe it was that you saw a friend who needed a hand and you spoke up! We can't watch while the world is waiting; we have to speak out and speak up! If you're reading this you are likely being a great advocate! Our challenge this month is for you find someone in the Council and share your story with us!

## *Self-Advocacy in Group Work*

*by Viv Banks*



To know the significance of being an advocate, we must understand the meaning of advocacy. Considering that The 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Café is finally here, it's important to revisit this question. So, what is advocacy?

To demonstrate the value of advocating, I want to highlight a personal experience. In high school, I was working on a semester-long project with another student. This was during the COVID-19 lockdown; everything was completed on Google Docs. I instantly got started on the project, however, my partner did not participate. Admittedly, there was one aspect that stood out to me. Each student, that worked in a group was required to complete an individual reflection sheet. Simultaneously, the students, that worked independently didn't need to write a reflection. After a month later, I felt like I was working alone. My partner did not contribute to any part of the project. Therefore, I should not have to submit a reflection sheet.

I advocated for myself by explaining this situation to my teacher. She understood my perspective, and gave my partner a chance to work on the project. In the end, my partner refused to cooperate, and I was excused from the reflection sheet. In addition, I received full credit for the project. Without advocating, I would have been in a much deeper situation. Furthermore, advocating is the act of bringing up your needs. It can be as simple as, "I don't have a pencil, could I borrow one?" If one doesn't bother to advocate for change, or for themselves, how would others know about an ongoing issue? Undeniably, advocating is an important aspect in society.



**ADVOCACY**



## *Even One Person Can Make a Difference*

*by Serena Wetmore*

Advocacy is important because it is a way of defending our rights. It serves to defend against injustice. It empowers people and even one advocate can make a difference in this world. Even if you do not think you can make a difference, your voice and your story are important. That is what being on the Youth Council has taught many people over the years. I feel fortunate to be one of those people. Without advocates, we would not have the rights we have today. People like Justin Dart (the Godfather of the ADA) and Judy Heumann (the Mother of the Disability Rights Movement), just to name two, had a huge impact on the lives of people with disabilities today. Advocates like them are why we have the ADA.



So many things are better today. People cannot discriminate against us for jobs. We can go to school. And thanks to things like Med-waiver and Medicaid, we can get health insurance. Thanks to Able United we can actually save some money for the future. However, we still have a long way to go. Maintaining our eligibility can be a real challenge. Schools, employers, and businesses still give us challenges. Not all buildings are disability accessible. Getting the proper kind of accommodations in a hotel is often difficult. Non-disabled people still use disabled parking illegally. Ableism still exists. These are the reasons why people like you and me need to be advocating, educating, and informing. Only through persistence will we make this world an even better place for those of us with disabilities.

## *Why It Is Important to Be An Advocate?*

*by Chelle Sandiford*



When I advocate, my voice is heard by other people and by the leaders of my community. I get the respect that I need from community leaders and the authorities when I speak up for myself. It teaches me how I can find a problem in my community and how I can fix it to make it better. It helps me as a person to feel confident about using my voice. If I advocate, I

can get the resources and services faster than just getting told no by leaders and teachers. It protects me and my right to speak freely about things I believe I need to help me learn differently. It can help people to understand what I need, which will help make me a better person. It makes me feel excited that I might be helping others, not just myself. We all have a voice that needs to be used to advocate for things that matter most to be fixed in your community. If you want to go to a regular class, speak up with your voice about it. If you want the police officer to be kind to you, go talk to them, get to know your police officers and tell them what you need and how they can help. People don't know what we need until we ask, so let's make a difference right now. Even if you are scared, you can make a difference.

## *I'm an Advocate*

*by Tamara Koren*


I want to be able to be a leader; I want to be able to speak comfortably to crowds; I know that will be my future. I want to be a disability advocate and will do all I know and have to do to get to that goal. I feel being on the Council is the first step. There is so much more to being an advocate for disabilities than just speaking; there are gifts and challenges that come with it. I am a strong person with many more traits, but are you ready to live up to those challenges? Most people are not. It's a gift; those gifts are some that will be challenging, fun, calming, and everything else you can name.

## *What Advocacy Does for Me*

*by Sky Elliot*

I am an advocate for others and myself, as well as anyone who doesn't have a voice. This is why we advocate for others. As a disabled person, advocating for myself and others is important. Advocating for what you need in school, homework, medical care, and more is why it is important to advocate. Advocating for others and yourself gives you the confidence to speak up for what you need or for someone else. It is very important to advocate for others and yourself. When you advocate for others and yourself, you can speak up for people who don't have a voice. I am their voice when they need something or anything. For people who don't have a voice, if anything, we are here to speak and to be heard. I am an advocate for myself and others, And as an advocate for others, this is what the Florida Youth Council is about: we advocate for people with disabilities and make sure our voices are heard. When we speak up for what is right and stand up for our rights as disabled people, everyone has a right to speak up and advocate for their needs and wants.





## *Advocacy is Essential*

*by John Howard Baldino*

A disability advocate supports disability rights and does things to make those rights known to all. It is important to understand how people with disabilities live their lives. Do they have barriers? Are they discriminated against? Are they accepted in places they want to go? When we find the answers to these questions, we can advocate to ensure that everyone is included and has equal opportunities in all aspects of life. “The Power of Advocacy” by the American Public Health Organization says there are three levels of advocacy:

1. Discuss advocacy with your family and friends.
2. Make others aware.
3. Talk to people who make the laws and policies.



What I try to do to advocate is talk to the people closest to me about my disabilities. I am not afraid to talk about them because it is important to make people understand my uniqueness. I also make others aware by being part of the Florida Youth Council and participating in The Family Café. I am part of educational sessions that describe how disabilities affect our lives. When I am at The Family Café programs, especially the annual meeting, I can talk to the legislators and other elected officials about improving our policies and making new laws that could help people with disabilities live longer and happier lives. Everyone should support the cause of disability rights!





## *Why Being An Advocate is Important to Me*

*by Jakel Baker*

Advocating for people with disabilities is something important to me. Let's talk about why being an advocate is important to me. Being with others who can relate to what I and many others go through is cool. For me, advocacy means standing up for each other and others who can't stand up for themselves. When we advocate for people with disabilities, we're pushing for a fair and equal society where everyone has the same opportunities, no matter their disability.

Advocacy helps break stereotypes about disabilities. By raising awareness and educating others, we create a more inclusive atmosphere, ensuring access and support. Being an advocate means ensuring people with disabilities have access to the support they need, like accessible buildings, technology, and services. It's about creating a world where everyone can live equally. Advocating for people with disabilities is about creating a more inclusive and accepting society. In the end, being an advocate means making sure everyone's voice is heard, no matter what might hold you back.



## *This is Why I Think It's Important to Be An Advocate*

*by Leah Gorman*

Being an advocate can help a lot of people who have disabilities and can't get their word out, but when a person realizes how they are talking to a person with disabilities, they are talking to them too fast. Also, they could say, "Oh, you don't have a disability. You're lying." But when they actually ran into them when they were doing something else, and they realize that that person has a disability, they probably feel wrong. I am going to tell you what I do, and I do a lot of things to help people with disabilities. I am an advocate for people with disabilities that can't get their word out before. I didn't even do it. Now, I'm still having trouble getting the correct word out, but I still go for my friends and meet other people to get their word out, and people with disabilities are not fighting because they are scary. When I say that, they are scared because I ran into many of my friends. They said they were frightened because they even tried to make calls to the places that were supposed to pick them up and drop them off on their way to work. I have a disability, and I'm trying to get to work and not be late because the manager is ready to fire them. I've also gone to the bus board meeting, and I told them that the bus is not picking up passengers who have a disability and not bringing them home.





## *Advocating is Crucial For Everyone!*

*by Lilibeth Vega*

Advocating for disability rights is crucial for fostering inclusivity, equality, and dignity within society. Firstly, it ensures that individuals with disabilities have equal access to opportunities, services, and resources, allowing them to participate fully in all aspects of life. This encompasses education, employment, healthcare, transportation, and recreation. Without advocacy, people with disabilities may face discrimination, exclusion, and barriers to fulfilling their potential. Secondly, advocating for disability rights promotes awareness and understanding, challenging stereotypes and misconceptions about disability. By highlighting the diverse abilities and contributions of individuals with disabilities, advocacy efforts strive to shift societal attitudes towards acceptance and respect.

Furthermore, advocating for disability rights helps to shape policies and legislation that protect the rights and interests of people with disabilities. This includes advocating for accessible infrastructure, reasonable accommodations, and anti-discrimination laws. By actively engaging in advocacy, individuals and organizations can influence decision-makers to prioritize the needs and concerns of the disability community. Moreover, advocating for disability rights is a matter of social justice and human rights. Every person, regardless of their abilities, deserves to be treated with dignity, respect, and equality under the law. By advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, we uphold these fundamental principles and work towards creating a more just and equitable society for all.

In conclusion, advocating for disability rights is essential for promoting inclusivity, challenging stereotypes, shaping policies, and upholding human rights. It is a collective responsibility to ensure that everyone, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to live a full and meaningful life.





## *Why Advocacy is Important to Me*

*by Morgan Griffin*

You may ask yourself why it is important to be an advocate. Well, it is an important part of the next generation of advocates who want to help be the voices and advocates of the future. They are the ones who are speaking up and speaking out for the next generation of advocates who do not have a voice yet and need your help to be just that for them and to help them speak up and speak out on what they believe in. They also can help be the voice in how they communicate when people won't listen or even care to listen to their voices in their community or even the next level of support they need to listen to them. Many people are pushed aside like they are nobodies. An advocate that can help you and the person you are trying to help make a difference in the next generation of advocates who are trying very hard to help make a bigger impact on the disabled community. Without advocacy there will be no accommodation for the disabled community, and then you will struggle with everyday life with a disability. This is the main reason for advocating for what you believe in and what you need to help you with your everyday life, because without advocacy and the community support and you, the disabled community would not have all the support that we have today.



## ***Being An Advocate – You Bet It’s Important!***

*by Derek Carraway*

Being an advocate is important. Advocacy is a powerful and vital catalyst for the change we want to see. We live in a world filled with injustice, and it is our duty as citizens to stand against this and make our voices heard, especially if it is a cause we feel strongly about that affects us personally. Advocates play a crucial role in this fight for justice. Advocates are the ones who step forward and take a stand, speaking out on behalf of others. They are the voice for the voiceless, bringing attention to the issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. They fight for rights, equality, and justice, making sure that no one is left behind. Being an advocate is not just about speaking out, but also about listening. It’s about understanding the struggles and challenges of those you advocate for and amplifying their voices. Advocates bridge the gap between those in power and those who feel powerless, creating a dialogue that can lead to meaningful change. In essence, advocates are the torchbearers in the darkness of injustice. They shine a light on the issues that matter, pushing for change and never backing down. Their importance cannot be overstated; without them, the world would be much darker. So, let’s all strive to be advocates in whatever capacity we can because every voice matters, and these are some reasons being an advocate is important!



## ***Being An Advocate– You Bet It’s Important!***

*by Vanessa Muniz-Pellicer*



What is an Advocate? An advocate is a person who publicly supports and recommends a cause, person, policy, etc. When you hear that definition, it sounds very technical, professional, and essential, but advocacy is a personal and straightforward thing to do. I like to think that some of the best advocates I've met in this world have been parents with children with disabilities. Growing up, my mom used to call herself my champion because

when there were times that I could not communicate or express what I needed, she would immediately get into action and be the one to handle those situations basically. I have learned a lot about advocacy since joining the Florida Youth Council in the last two years. Before joining, I had thought no one was advocating for change within the disability community, but then I went to my first Family Café and joined the FYC. There are still so many things that aren't in place, and helping support change to help and support neurodivergent individuals is a true joy of mine. One of the best things that I have found by being within the Council is that the Council is made up of many different kinds of people, different disabilities to advocate for, different views that are expressed, different support systems that are talked about, and it helps promote our overall goal of advocacy among everyone within the disability community.

Personally, I think one of the main reasons why advocacy is necessary is because change doesn't happen when we accept what systems are already in place. No one made a change by sitting down and doing nothing; change only happens when others talk. It might be small, it might be just a group of people who meet up every few months and talk about what's necessary for the disability community, or it could be huge, it could be a significant conference that gathers people from all over to express new ideas, new supports, and new conditions that are available that can be mainstreamed all over. I encourage everyone to try and advocate for their needs, for their rights, and try and be your own champion. I'll leave you with one of my favorite quotes by the Dalai Lama: "Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far reaching effects."

## *Advocacy is Important to Me!*


*by JJ Humphrey*



In 2020, during that time when I was stuck at home, I decided that I wanted to become a disability advocate. I knew very little about advocacy, but I was open to learning. My friends knew I had epilepsy, but during Autism Acceptance Month in April, I decided to “come out” to my friends about autism, too. This opened up discussions. I was asked to join Epilepsy Alliance Florida’s Youth Advocacy Council, and I applied to the Florida Youth Council, where after the interview, mock *Noodle* articles, and mock vlog, I got accepted there as well. Through the experience of the FYC and YAC, I learned that advocacy is so important and a key component of how our country works. Years before I joined the FYC, a bill passed in Florida, set aside the first two weeks of October as Disability and History Awareness weeks.



During the first year I was on the Council, I asked all my teacher friends if they had done anything special during these weeks. I was homeschooled, so I never heard of this before. It turned out that many of my public school teacher friends had never heard of it either until I mentioned it to them. Of all I asked, one teacher had heard of it and taught about it. In fact, for the last few years, he has had his class write skits for a local theatre troupe for actors with disabilities. He begins the school year teaching about disabilities and has a curriculum for writing the skits. In November, I went to the state Capitol with the Epilepsy Alliance Florida YAC. This was the first time I had the chance to meet everyone in person. Employees of Epilepsy Alliance Florida were there as well and guided us. We were given itineraries on who each member was going to meet with. The next day, we went to the Capitol, and I was assigned to man the table we had set up in the rotunda. I was also assigned to share my story and advocate for more funding for epilepsy nonprofits in Florida.

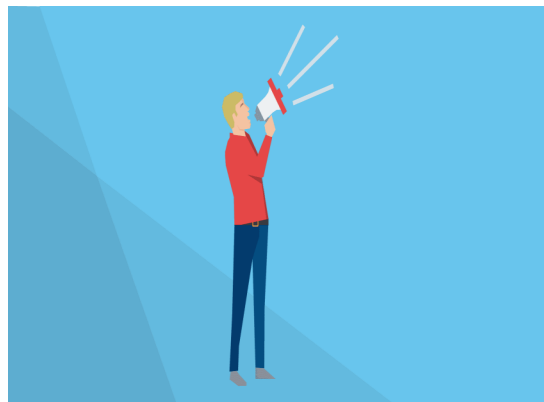


## *Advocacy is Within Me*

*by Alex Gonzalez*

Advocates have dreams. Advocates have convictions. Advocates have power. It may seem vague what I just said, but remember, advocacy communicates with one person or group with a vision to set the foundation for reaching a common goal. Now, believe it or not, you could wonder if this has anything to do with me. Well, when you fight and make sacrifices to believe in a future that helps hundreds of people live in prosperity, you are an advocate.

Advocacy is important because we, as human beings, can have an opportunity to change the world regardless of where we're from. My mother is a prime example of what it means to be an advocate. She fought for my rights as a child and never stopped advocating for me until high school. She is the reason why I am who I am today. She served as an inspiration for me because she provided the opportunity to help me speak up for myself and eventually led me to help individuals who are like me. As I got older, I knew I had to do things independently. I had to advocate for my accommodations in college, for myself when I got a job, and for my rights as a citizen. In July 2021, I joined the Polk State College Student Government Association (SGA) as an officer. In the 2021-2022 academic year, I traveled to many conferences in the state and across the country. I met with students from different colleges across the state and nationwide. I went from officer to Jurisprudence and was eventually appointed Vice-President of SGA. My experiences in SGA helped me learn how to advocate for students across campus. I learned so much about the people I work with, and the students motivate me to persevere. Now that I'm continuing my part on the Florida Youth Council, I resume the initiative of striving for greatness for our community.



## *This is Why I Am Who I Am*

*by Josue Tapia*



Imagine yourself five-years-old, your first time visiting New York, being born in Puerto Rico. The bright lights and the loud cars. The city seemed like it had no bed-time. It was such a delight to me. But one day, by a random mishap or moment of fate, I tripped while playing outside with a cousin. When I got up, my eye was icy, so I scratched it. Little did I know that that moment was going to change my life forever.

Advocacy is important to me. In a matter of months after scratching my eye, I got pink eye in my right eye that mutated and attacked the left, and I went blind right around the summer of my 6th birthday. I share this because through all that pain and uncertainty as it was happening, I had someone who would at least tell me that I would see them again one day. That one day, things would be better, and that person was my mom. I want to be the same person who fought for me when I felt like my darkness was endless. I want to always fight as hard as the person who showed me my story can improve someone else's story. Being an advocate is continuing the stories of those who lost their passion for writing but love the experiences a good story brings.





## How Do I Become Part of The Florida Youth Council?

The Florida Youth Council is a group of youth (between the ages of 15 and 17) and emerging leaders (between the ages of 18 and 30) with disabilities or special health care needs that live in Florida.

The Florida Youth Council is all about getting youth and emerging leaders involved in self-advocacy, peer mentoring and other activities that will improve the quality of life for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities in Florida. The program empowers youth and emerging leaders to decide what issues are important to their generation, to discuss those issues in their state and local communities, and to develop strategies to address them.

We are seeking a group of enthusiastic, motivated youth and emerging leaders to participate. If you would like to take a leadership role in advocating for youth and emerging leaders in Florida, please visit The Florida Youth Council website at [www.floridayouthcouncil.com](http://www.floridayouthcouncil.com). The program is open to application year round.

We hope to hear from you soon!



713 East Park Avenue  
Tallahassee, FL 32301  
[FamilyCafe.net](http://FamilyCafe.net)

