



the NOODLE

Open up and say AHHHH!!!



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Welcome to the June 2025 edition of *The Noodle*, written and published by members of The Florida Youth Council! For this issue of *The Noodle*, members of the FYC wrote about The 27th Annual Family Café, and how they tell other people all about it. We hope you enjoy learning about our experiences and our thoughts and opinions in this edition of *The Noodle*!

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The 27th Annual Family Café is right around the corner, and before you know it, it will be Café Day! This year our community is facing a growing a number of adversities and challenges with changes to our political climate. Join us as together we learn to navigate this new environment through networking, visiting local agency representatives at the Exhibit Hall, attending sessions, and much more. So far 2025 has been a year of change for everyone, but together we can learn and overcome. Like The Family Cafe motto goes, “Nothing About us, Without Us!”

Changed for the Better

by JJ Humphrey



The Family Café has changed my life in ways that I didn't think were possible. When an opportunity comes up to suggest The Family Café to someone, I don't hesitate. I've shared with friends, people I've just met, and on social media!

When most people hear mention of The Family Café, they think I'm going to talk to them about food. The Family Café has nothing to do with food and everything to do with disabilities, support, information, and most importantly, friendships. The Annual Family Café is a great place to connect, learn, and grow in an environment that celebrates inclusion and em-

powerment. I personally benefited from the annual event and being a member of The Florida Youth Council, a program of The Family Café. This experience allowed me to grow as an artist and showed the real world impact of the community and resources provided by The Family Café.

Beyond The Annual Family Café events, The Florida Youth Council has been vital to my growth as an advocate and leader. When I joined the FYC in 2020, I never imagined I'd be part of the leadership team. The meetings and face-to-face events taught me how to manage my time, prioritize, and be a leader, and most importantly I'm learning to be more independent. This year, was the first time I traveled and stayed overnight without family. I went with other members of the leadership team to Tallahassee by bus twice, once as part of the Planning Committee for The 27th Annual Family Café, and once for a conference at the Capitol. This gives me hope that one day I will be fully independent.

Sharing is Caring

by Zeta Gil

Whenever I meet someone with a disability, or a parent of a child with a disability, I always share information about The Family Café. It's the first thing I recommend because there are so many helpful resources, supports, and services all in one place.

One way I invite people is by sending them the official link right away and explaining how the event works, especially the hotel setup and what to expect over the weekend. Another way is by telling them how personally impactful it's been for me. I explain that for kids and teens with disabilities, it can often feel like we're the only ones going through it. But at The Family Café, you're surrounded by people who get it. You're not the odd one out, you're part of a big, welcoming community, even if it's just one weekend. It feels nice when accessibility is the standard. That feeling of belonging is what makes it so special.

My 1st Time at The Family Café

by Miles Stewart

The Annual Family Café is upon us! I invited guests by passing out letters to people who have disabilities like me or just asking some of my friends if they wanted to come to this event. This is my first time at The Annual Family Café, so I'm excited to see how it will go. I feel nervous, because as a member of The Florida Youth Council a lot is expected. My experience thus far has been amazing. I thought that being on the Council would be boring. It has turned out to be a cool group of friends like family who are willing to guide me on my advocacy journey.



Why The Café Should Be Special To All of Us

by Serena Wetmore

Inviting people to the Café is easy for me; I do it all the time. One of the ways I invite people is simply by pulling out the application for registration form and handing it to them. I almost always carry some in my backpack. If I don't have one for this year, I will give them one from last year! There is another, more modern way I do it at my volunteer job. I have a stand on my wheelchair tray and it holds a QR code for people to scan and register! This is very handy as people can sign up right then and not risk losing the paper.

I've been going to The Annual Family Café since I was young, maybe 11 years old. The most important thing the Café has impressed upon me is that we are the experts on our own circumstances and sharing our expertise can help others in similar situations. Another thing the Café has taught me is that you're never done learning as a person with a disability, or as an advocate.

The Café is special because it reminds me we are not alone in our struggles. Whenever I attend, I am overcome with the joy of the shared experience and knowing that I am accepted by everyone and that I have another opportunity to help people. I love seeing all my friends that I have made over the many years I have been attending. In fact, when I arrive, I always feel like I am back home!



You Know What Family Cafe Is Cooking?

by Alex Gonzalez

The Family Cafe. The real question is where to start. This conference is something I have always looked forward to each year. I have been attending The Annual Family Café since I was a little kid. There are countless Family Café stories I would love to share, but I worry this note will turn into an essay.

The main reason to attend the conference is to experience a genuine sense of community. For those who have never been to an Annual Family Cafe before, let me explain that it's an opportunity unlike any other. Family Café is dedicated to helping families of children with disabilities. People from all over the country come together to learn, connect, and share their knowledge and experiences.

In my job, I collaborate with many people from different departments, and I always spread the word about the conference—whether through word of mouth, emails, or by handing out flyers. It's a means to build bridges and access the valuable resources this conference offers.

The Family Cafe means a lot to me because I have formed numerous connections and friendships along the way. Over the past 20+ years, I have built both personal and professional relationships. Of course, I owe a lot of this to my mom, who took me to a conference like this when I was younger; I truly believe I wouldn't be where I am today without that experience. If you are reading this and are about to attend your first Family Café, all I can say is: Where have you been for the last 27 years?



The Family Café Conference: A Real Special Event!

by Derek Carraway

The Annual Family Café is a remarkable event that brings together individuals with disabilities, their families, and advocates for a weekend of empowerment, education, and community.

Held annually in Orlando, Florida, this conference is the largest statewide cross-disability event in the nation. It offers a unique platform for attendees to access a wealth of resources, including informative breakout sessions, a bustling exhibit hall, and special events featuring keynote speakers and the Summit on Disabilities.



What makes this conference truly special is its focus on fostering collaboration and advocacy. Participants have the opportunity to network with policy-making officials, gain insights from experts, and connect with others who share similar experiences. The inclusive and supportive environment encourages meaningful dialogue and the sharing of best practices, which can significantly impact the lives of those with disabilities.

Inviting someone to attend The Annual Family Café means offering them a chance to be part of a transformative experience. It's an opportunity to learn, grow, and be inspired by the resilience and strength of the disability community.

Whether you're seeking information, support, or simply a sense of belonging, this conference is a must-attend event that promises to leave a lasting impression.

All of this is how I would describe how special this event is and how I would convince people to attend!

You're Invited

by Leah Gorman

Hi, my name is Leah and I am going to let you know about The 27th Annual Family Café event and what it means to me.

So one of the ways I tell people is by just talking about it. I walk up to those I think might be interested and ask, “Do you know what our event is and what it stands for?” If they say no, I proceed to explain and share with them the wonders of the event. From vendors to sessions to inspirational dances on disability health, there's something for everyone!

The way I talk to those who have a disability or issue trying to get stuff for their wheelchair or other health issues is by saying that this is the environment for you, and anyone attending will gladly help you around and help you out with this part of the event.

This event helps the disabled community in so many ways that it's hard to put in words. All I can truly say is that The Annual Family Café is special to me and to thousands of others, and I hope you attend and join us to celebrate our community together!



Welcome to the Experience

by Vanessa Muniz-Pellicer

This coming June marks The 27th Annual Family Café, a space where people with disabilities (like you and me) come together to connect, learn, and lift each other up. When I first attended this conference, I was not sure what I was going to walk into. All I knew was that there were breakout sessions and an exhibit hall with different vendors, and I would have the opportunity to talk with people with disabilities such as myself. As I continued throughout the conference, I was able to meet people who understood my story and plight, and I was able to find my community.

I would say that the conference is not just an educational and social event, it is also an experience of learning more about the disability community, and feeling seen, heard, and empowered. This conference is where that happens. This is where you want to go.



Somehow, by the time I made it to my second conference I was part of the Florida Youth Council, so my experience of the second conference was a little different. It was so much better! I became more of an advocate for people with disabilities and I was able to see all these small aspects of the day-to-day tasks that needed to be completed for this conference to occur. The amount of dedication and passion that goes in-

to this event is wonderful to see and the fact that I was able to help make these conferences happen just makes me so proud of myself and my fellow members. I hope that more people get to attend and get to participate in The Annual Family Café!

The Event of all Events!

by Lilibeth Carrion Vega

The Family Café is not just an event; it is a dynamic community that connects thousands of individuals and families. This extraordinary gathering offers a unique chance for families of children and adults with disabilities to come together, share their journeys, and tap into a rich array of support and resources. Participants can immerse themselves in enlightening sessions, engage in impactful advocacy discussions, and connect with dedicated professionals committed to helping them navigate their challenges.



Beyond its focus on education and support, the The Family Café cultivates a warm and inviting atmosphere where families can bond, enjoy quality time, and create cherished memories filled with joy and laughter.

I have attended Family Café for years. During my first time I came with my family. Now as an adult I continue coming on my own. Throughout the years I have learned and connected with many professionals and

community organizations. I have listened to inspiring stories of success, not only from our speakers, but from the attendees as well. I have learned how to become a better advocate for myself and those around me, and most importantly, I have met a whole new family within the attendees. I have made friendships that will last a lifetime. I keep coming back to The Family Café because every year I learn something new and meet new wonderful people that have impacted my life in more than one way.

The Family Café is for everyone, from parents of a newly diagnosed child looking for information and support, to a young adult looking to connect with resources and make new long-lasting friendships and partnerships. This event is beneficial for everyone involved, me included.



The Family Café is Special Because...

by Jakel Baker

I'm Jakel Baker, and I'm part of the Florida Youth Council. Every year, we hold something called The Annual Family Café, and this year it is the 27th one. It's made for youth with disabilities across Florida, and it's a space where we can speak up, be ourselves, and connect with people. If you've never been, it's worth checking out not just because it's fun, but because you leave learning something special.

The biggest thing about The Annual Family Café is you don't have to explain yourself. Everyone there knows what it's like to deal with challenges, and you don't feel like you have to act a certain way. It's one of the few places where you can just be you. Whether it's during group discussions or just hanging out, you end up meeting people who you can relate to.

Café isn't just a hangout. It teaches you how to speak up, lead, and take action. There are workshops on advocacy, leadership, and communication, but they're not boring or complicated. You learn how to share your story, how to talk to decision makers, and how to navigate systems that affect your life. A lot of people leave more confident than when they showed up.

How would I invite someone to The Family Café?

"There's this event called Café that I go to every year. It's for youth with disabilities, and it's actually a solid experience. You meet cool people, learn useful stuff, and it's a good time. You should come. You'd probably get a lot out of The Annual Family Café. It's not fake or boring. It's real talk, real people, and a chance to grow. I can send you the info if you're interested."

The Annual Family Café might only last a weekend, but it leaves a big impact. You leave knowing more, feeling more confident, and realizing you're not alone in what you go through. It's not about pretending. It's about showing up and growing with people who understand.



What Café Means to Me

by Morgan Griffin

The Family Café is special to me because it has changed my life for the better.

For so many reasons, The Family Café has provided me with a lot of wonderful resources to help me with school and beyond school that I would have never known about before attending. It has also helped me with additional education tips for my advocacy journey. The Family Café also helps me to speak up for myself and those that are to scared to speak up and speak out for themselves. They also taught me how to let others speak for themselves and hear what they have to say.

The Family Café has all the best tools to make sure you have all the best information. It doesn't matter what stage of transition you are experiencing. It even includes your adulthood as well. This is how The Family Café has helped to change my life. This is why The Family Café is special to me. It's because it is a life-changing experience. So what are waiting for? Register to come! Hope to see you there!



My Steps to Inviting People to The Family Café

by Michelle Sandiford

First, I would say “Hi” and introduce myself, then I would ask “Have you ever heard of The Family Café?” I would say that The Family Café helps parents find the resources they need to help their child get through school and to go to college. I would tell people about the different booths that they have at The Family Café.

Next, I would send them to The Family Café website at FamilyCafe.net. I would tell them this is how you can register and learn more about The Family Café. Also, this is where you can look at and learn more about the FYC. I would tell them there is media that you watch about The Family Café.

Lastly, I would tell the people why I like going to The Family Café. I like going because I get to use my voice to help people going through the same thing I am going through. I also get to go around and speak to new people. There are many booths that are at The Family Café. I like the ones with fidget toys, they are the best.

Here are some things I have learned:

1. Introduce yourself.
2. Send people to the website.
3. Tell them why you like it!





As Summer
Comes To An
End, Join
**The Florida
Youth Council**
For One Big Last
Hurrah At
**The 18th Annual
Youth Summit**
On **August 8-9**
In Orlando!

The Annual Youth Summit is a place for young people with disabilities between the ages of 15 and 30 from communities across the state of Florida to come together to learn, share, and network. This two-day event is hosted by **The Florida Youth Council (FYC)**, a group of youth and emerging leaders with disabilities who have a passion for encouraging leadership and advocacy among their peers. The FYC is all about youth empowerment and youth involvement, and the entire **Annual Youth Summit** is planned by youth, for youth!

The 18th Annual Youth Summit will bring together over 200 youth and emerging leaders to attend engaging youth-only sessions on a wide variety of topics, including transition, workplace preparedness, and post-secondary schooling. We will have a great, youth-friendly keynote and fun activities at The Summit, including a dance party to cap off the festivities. There were plenty of opportunities for attendees to network, and share their thoughts, experiences, and aspirations.

The 18th Annual Youth Summit will be held at The Florida Hotel and Conference Center in Orlando **August 8-9, 2025**. Limited financial assistance is available. Attendees not requesting financial assistance should contact the reservation line at **800-588-4656** to make reservations and identify themselves as attendees of The Family Café for a special room rate of \$117 per night.

**WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING
YOU IN ORLANDO IN AUGUST!**



FREE ONLINE REGISTRATION!
familycafe.net/register-for-the-annual-youth-summit/





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 floridayouthcouncil.com. The program is open to application year round.

We hope to hear from you soon!



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floridayouthcouncil.org