



The NOODLE

Open up and say AHHHH!!!



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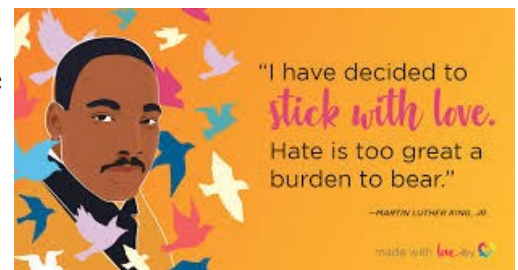
February, 2026

Welcome to the February 2026 edition of *The Noodle*, written and published by members of The Florida Youth Council! For this issue of *The Noodle*, the members share their perspectives on love, and some share what they enjoy doing for fun. We hope you enjoy learning about our experiences and our thoughts and opinions in this edition of *The Noodle*!

Current Members:

Jakel Baker
Shevie Barnes
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Leah Gorman
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Anthony LaCava
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Vanessa Muniz-Pellicer
Michelle Sandiford
Miles Stewart
Josue Tapia
Lilibeth Carrion Vega
Serena Wetmore

This month most of the FYC members chose to highlight that February is noted as the month of love. Going right along with the theme, one thing I love about this month is it's also Black History Month! Established in 1926 as a week to learn the history of fellow citizens, Black History Month was changed to a month nearly 50 years later. In today's time it's a moment to show some love to Black citizens and all their accomplishments. How fitting that it is also in the month of love, as it originated with the ideas of humanity, respect and love! We hope that as you go through this month you will show some love to yourself and those you love, and also take a moment to learn some of the cool accomplishments of Black people too!





Family Matters

by Jakel Baker

Valentine's Day is this month, so I wanted to take some time to write about how much I appreciate my friends and family, and why we should never take their love for granted.

In a world filled with constant negativity and hate for personal gain, the moments we receive from friends and family can sometimes feel rare and incredibly valuable. Whether it's spending time together in person or simply talking from afar, that connection matters more than we realize.

Growing up with ADD and autism, I have struggled with emotional stability. Thank God, over the years I've learned to manage it better. My family has always treated me with patience and kindness, taking the time to understand the challenges I face. I've also made friends who share similar struggles, and that has meant a lot to me.

I believe Valentine's Day is a great reminder of how much the people around us love us even if they don't always show it in the ways we expect. It's a day to give thanks to the people who bring joy and love into our lives.

Personally, I make sure to thank my mom every year for the constant love she has given me. Without our friends and family, the world would feel pretty empty and just plain. So this Valentine's Day, celebrate it. Show appreciation for those you love and for those who love you more than you may ever fully realize.



Fun Things to Do with Friends

by Chelle Sandiford

In my community we have a lot of amazing activities for us to do. We get to do art painting pictures like trees and outer space. We made bird houses out of paper towel rolls to feed the birds. Sometimes we have a few students from Florida State University come and help us out with our art projects.

There is a big room with lots of computers, a coach, and a TV that is the place where we can play games like bingo and Uno. Sometimes when we play bingo a group from Florida State will come and play bingo with us. I have made a lot of friends in my community just by going and playing bingo.

We also have a media room with a TV where we all meet up to sing a song that we like through a microphone. It's called karaoke. We also have a night where we can come down to the community club house and eat dinner together. We call this Friday night social. I always like sitting with my friends during this time. They make me feel happy!



How I Make Art

by Serena Wetmore

I have always wanted to learn how to paint and do art in general, but I have never really been able to accomplish it on my own. I had my drawing pad app in high school, but I couldn't do it for a long time because I either forgot the name of the app or they pulled it out of the App Store. A couple months ago I found it again so now I can "paint" again at home.

However, the last year or so I started painting regularly with my therapist, and I want to explain how we accomplish it. I have cerebral palsy which makes my muscles and joints very spastic. This means that I have trouble holding pens, crayons, brushes, etc., especially with any control. We have a routine that we now do. The first thing we do is put on my headset for my biofeedback app. The one I use is Vital Neuro, though there may be others out there.

This helps me to relax my body and focus on certain muscle groups. Then we stretch my arms and hands to get them into the correct position to hold the brush. While I am still using the headset, my OT places the brush in my hand, then puts her hand slightly below mine and holds the brush. From this point on I control the movements of the brush. She just helps me keep it straight. I love being able to express myself through my art!



Using Social Media to Shine a Light on ADHD and Autism

by James Kuhlman

When it comes to disability awareness topics, I am very passionate about a lot of different things. A disability awareness topic that I am most passionate about is ADHD and Autism awareness. I share with others about ADHD awareness through videos that are posted on social media. If you asked any of my friends how many ADHD videos I send them, they would probably say about 25-30 videos a week. But, I just don't share random videos. I specifically choose videos that best bring awareness about ADHD and explain ADHD tendencies to them.

Today in the world, there are so many disability advocating videos on social media. I use social media videos like that to advocate about disabilities that I have and that others have. I find that by sending disability advocacy videos to my friends, they better understand me and the many tendencies that I have. I feel that some tendencies are hard for me to explain to others, and so by sending advocacy videos to others, I use that tool to explain the tendencies that I have a hard time explaining.



Before Friends, I Had Animals

by Zeta Gil

I moved to the United States in third grade, into classrooms where everyone else seemed to have known each other their entire lives. I was new, I was different, I was weird. I felt very out of place. I was bullied, struggled to make friends, and sat around at PE while all the other kids had fun. Animals were the first beings that didn't treat me differently because of my disability. Animals never made fun of me, they didn't care how I moved or how I spoke or what my body could or couldn't do. I never had to explain myself to them, I was never too much or too different. With animals, I was simply allowed to exist as I am.

For a long time, they were my only friends. That might sound sad, but I found comfort in them. When I changed schools, lost friendships, or lost my home, my pets were always there for me. They were a constant in an ever-changing world.

When people ask me why I founded an animal rescue, I often say something along the lines of "I kind of just fell into it" or "I started fostering to pass time and fell in love with it."

The truth is, I'm giving back to the first population that I never had to justify my existence to.

Today, my nonprofit does a lot of animal rescue, but especially the rescue of disabled animals, the ones that are "too complicated," or "too expensive," or "too much work," the ones more unlikely to be saved because they require more resources than people are willing to give. I see myself in those animals more often than I'm willing to admit. I know that in another country, another time period, or without the right support systems, my own life might've been considered expendable. I know firsthand how blurry the line can be between "worth saving" and "not worth the effort." But with the right resources, effort, and patience, these animals thrive. And the same is true for disabled kids. We are stronger and more re-



silient than any other kids out there because we thrive in environments and systems that weren't built with us in mind. And when we fail, it's rarely because we're not capable, it's because we're unsupported. I guess you could say my work with animals is one way I push back against that logic.

The Heart of Friendship and Family

by Leah Gorman

What does it mean when you find a sad friend or family member and give them your heart? It means you help them feel happy, safe, and calm. The Florida Youth Council is a wonderful group of people with different disabilities from all around the state of Florida. Today, I want to talk about showing love to friends and family.

First, you should help them when they are sad or afraid to talk or go somewhere. Second, spend time hanging out with your friends and family because anything can happen, and you don't want to miss special moments with them. Finally, love them deeply and keep them in your heart, because you never know when you might not be able to see or talk to them.

Overall, I want to share that love is important for friends and family. My favorite family is the Florida Youth Council because I have met many new friends at The Annual Family Cafe and at our 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 www.floridayouthcouncil.com. The program is open to application year round.

We hope to hear from you soon!



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