



# The NOODLE

Open up and say AHHHH!!!



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**W**elcome to the March 2026 edition of *The Noodle*, written and published by members of The Florida Youth Council! For this issue of *The Noodle*, members share their perspectives on the different awareness days celebrated in March, 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*!

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*Miles Stewart*  
*Josue Tapia*  
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This collection of articles highlights important issues surrounding disability awareness, advocacy, and inclusion. Each piece reflects on personal experiences, community challenges, and the importance of creating a society that values and supports individuals with disabilities. From understanding Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month to discussing the importance of disability resources on college campuses and the power of advocacy, these articles aim to inspire readers to learn, reflect, and take action toward building a more inclusive and supportive world.



## Beyond Awareness: Honoring the Strength and Contributions of People with Developmental Disabilities

*by Jakel Baker*

March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, and I decided to focus on this as my topic. I wanted to take some time to reflect on why this month is so important and what it truly represents.



Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month was first established in 1987 by President Ronald Reagan. Since then, it has grown into a meaningful time across the country to recognize the real trials and tribulations that people with developmental disabilities face every single day. Many of these struggles often go unseen or are misunderstood, which is why awareness is so important. There is still a lot of neglect, lack of understanding, and unfair treatment that happens far too often. One month is not enough to fully represent an entire community, but it is a strong and necessary starting point.

Organizations like The Arc of the United States continue to advocate for inclusion, equal rights, and real opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities. This shows progress. It shows that voices are being heard more today than they were in the past.

What I truly appreciate about this month is that it is not only about highlighting challenges. It is also about recognizing the strengths, talents, and value that people with developmental disabilities bring to society. Awareness leads to understanding, and understanding leads to change. When people become educated, stereotypes begin to break down. Schools grow more inclusive, workplaces become more supportive, and communities become more compassionate.

At the end of the day, everyone deserves dignity and respect. Inclusion should not be something we only talk about once a year. It should be something we actively practice every single day. March serves as a reminder that every individual has worth, purpose, and something meaningful to contribute to the world.



## Rolling with Serena

*by Serena Wetmore*

Dungeons & Dragons is one of my favorite pastimes. Most people probably do not understand why so many of us love playing the game. The reason I love it is because I am on the same playing field with the other players. It isn't about being the fastest or the strongest, or even the smartest. I am not really into sports or other outdoor activities. However, in this game, I get to create my own character who can do things that I cannot physically do. And really things that no human can.

It is a great social activity where you can go on quests, perform magic, and even do incredible feats. For my birthday this year, my friend created and ran a Dungeons & Dragons campaign in which I was able to pick the setting we would play. Even though I knew the setting, how the game played out was a fun surprise. People by nature do unpredictable things, especially when playing as a character they invent personally. Players tend to put some of themselves into their characters, so you can learn a lot about a person by how they play their character. I like that I can play this game just as well as anyone else, and that I sometimes even get to be the hero. But probably the best thing about my birthday game was we had the biggest group turnout that we have had since I started playing with them a couple years ago. It let me know that I was an important and valued member of this group of friends.



## Level Up: How Video Games Became A Part of Life

*by Miles Stewart*

Video games have always played an important role in my life. Ever since I was a child, I have been fascinated by them and often wondered what first drew me to them. Looking back, I realize that video games were never just entertainment for me. They became a way to connect with others, express creativity, and explore my imagination.

One of my earliest memories of video games was when my brother and I would sleep over at our grandmother's house every Friday night. During those visits, we spent hours playing on the Wii, the first gaming console I ever experienced. Those moments were special because we were not just playing games—we were laughing, competing, and spending meaningful time together. It was during those nights that I realized video games have the power to bring people together and create lasting memories.

Video games also spark my imagination in ways few other things can. Because they take place in virtual worlds, the possibilities feel endless. Players can picture themselves inside the story or even use their artistic talents to create their own versions of these worlds. Many game designers treat their games like works of art, building rich environments and characters that feel alive. That is why I feel such a strong connection to video games—they inspire creativity and allow me to see the world through a more imaginative and creative lens.



## Why “Disability” still matters

by James Kuhlman

Recently, I have noticed a growing trend at colleges across the United States: many schools are changing the names of their disability centers and removing the word *disability* from the title.

I decided to write about this topic because my own college is currently considering a name change for its Disability Resource Center. The school has been hosting sessions to gather input from students about the change. At the session I attended, however, I noticed that many people did not think it was important to keep the word *disability* in the name.



The current name of the center at my college is the **Disability Resource Center**, and the goal of the proposed change is to create a name that feels more meaningful and impactful for students with disabilities. In my opinion, colleges across the United States should keep the word *disability* in the title. Removing it and replacing it with something like **Accessibility Resource Center** could cause confusion for students with disabilities and for the student body as a whole. A name like that may make it seem as though the center helps any student rather than specifically supporting students with disabilities.

I have experienced this confusion firsthand. When my mom and I toured colleges, we often looked for the disability center to ask about accommodations. At some schools, the office did not include the word *disability* in its name, and we had no idea where to go. While this is my opinion, many members of my college’s Disabled Student Union and the Florida Youth Council agree. Keeping the word *disability* ensures clarity and visibility for the community the center serves.



## Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

*by Lilibeth Carrion Vega*

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month is an important annual observance that promotes public understanding and acceptance of individuals with developmental disabilities. It provides an opportunity to highlight the abilities, contributions, and rights of people living with these conditions while encouraging a more inclusive society.

Developmental disabilities are a group of chronic conditions that begin during the developmental period, typically before the age of 22. These disabilities can affect physical, learning, language, or behavioral areas and include conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities, and Down syndrome. The challenges faced by individuals with developmental disabilities vary widely but may include difficulties with communication, mobility, self-care, and social interaction.

This awareness month helps educate communities about the barriers individuals with developmental disabilities often face, including challenges in education, employment, healthcare, and social participation. It also highlights the importance of support systems, early intervention, accessible resources, and policies that promote equality and opportunity. By increasing awareness, people are encouraged to recognize the strengths and potential of individuals with developmental disabilities while reducing stereotypes and stigma.

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month reminds us to celebrate diversity and work toward communities that value inclusion, respect differences, and ensure equal opportunities for everyone.



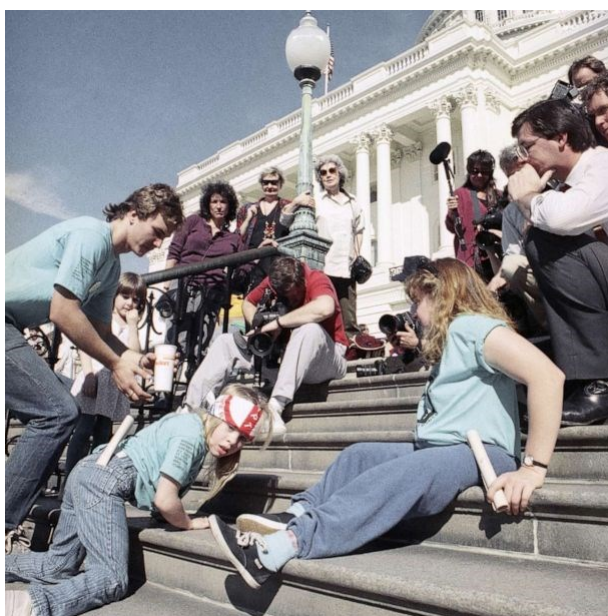
## Turning Disability into Advocacy and Change

*by Josue Tapia*

I have been disabled for more than 30 years, and during that time I have experienced many ups and downs—more than I could ever fully name. I have traveled to different states and seen how each views disability, and I have even had the opportunity to be part of creating change at the Capitol. Through all of these experiences, I have learned that being part of positive change is one of the most fulfilling things a person can do.

I have been advocating for people with disabilities for two decades, and it is one of the most meaningful things I have ever done. Being visually impaired has come with challenges, but being part of the disability advocacy movement has brought many positive experiences. I have helped pass legislation, met with politicians, and hosted yearly events for families who have members with disabilities.

Having a disability can become the catalyst for something great. I have had the opportunity to meet wonderful people I may never have met otherwise. I am proud to say that my disability has helped me become more aware of others and their struggles, while also making me the strongest person I know. My message is simple: keep fighting, keep advocating, and be part of the change.





# 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!



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