



the NOODLE

Open up and say AHHHH!!!



Volume 19, Issue 3

October, 2026

Welcome to the October 2026 edition of *The Noodle*, written and published by members of The Florida Youth Council! This month's *Noodle* explores disability, mental health, therapy, creativity, history, heroism, and spooky-season adventures, sharing personal stories, inspiring people, and unique perspectives from our Florida Youth Council members.

Current Members:

Jakel Baker
Shevie Barnes
Olivia Burka
Nigel Diaz
Zeta Gil
Leah Gorman
JJ Humphrey
James Kuhlman
Anthony LaCava
Sydney Lanier
Vanessa Muniz-Pellicer
Michelle Sandiford
Miles Stewart
Josue Tapia
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Serena Wetmore



October is a month of reflection, connection, and celebration of what makes each of us unique. The first two weeks of October are Disability History and Awareness Weeks, giving us an opportunity to recognize the history, achievements, contributions, and voices of people with disabilities.

As the seasons change, it's a time to celebrate the strengths and experiences of youth with disabilities. This month, together we celebrate the courage, accomplishments, and limitless potential of youth with disabilities while continuing to build a more inclusive future for everyone.

The Guide Dog Who Became a Hero

Sydney Lanier

As we remember the 25th anniversary of September 11, 2001, we honor the people who lost their lives, including the heroes who risked everything to save others. But did you know that a dog helped save lives that day, too?



Her name was Roselle, a Labrador Retriever and guide dog for Michael Hingson, who had been blind since birth. Michael worked on the 83rd floor of the World Trade Center's North Tower, with Roselle resting under his desk.

On the morning of September 11th, a loud boom woke Roselle. She nudged Michael's hand, alerting him that something was wrong. Michael grabbed her harness, and Roselle calmly led him out of the building. About 30 other people followed them down the stairs. Despite the panic around them, Roselle remained focused on her job. At one point, she stopped to comfort a frightened woman by giving her kisses before continuing down the stairs.

Michael, Roselle, and the people following them escaped the tower just before it collapsed. They reached a subway station, where they also helped a woman who had been temporarily blinded by debris.

Roselle later received recognition for her bravery and became known as a hero dog. She retired and died from a stomach condition in 2011. Her story lives on through Michael's book about her courage and their friendship.

While we celebrate Roselle's heroism, we must also remember everyone who lost their lives on September 11th. Their memories will never be forgotten.

A Big Thank You to Occupational Therapists

Serena Wetmore

I was looking for something to write about and discovered that October 27th is World Occupational Therapy Day. I thought, what a great opportunity to say thank you to all the therapists out there!

I started occupational and physical therapy when I was about six months old. I don't remember much about that time, but the therapist I started with when I was about four years old stayed with me until a few months ago. Over the years, we grew together, learned from each other, and eventually became friends.

She helped me with my sitting posture, arm extension, muscle tone, stretching, and dexterity. She also spent a lot of time helping me work on my breathing, which helped with my speech and taught me ways to relax.

What I remember most, though, is the emotional support she provided when I had a bad day and needed someone to talk to. She was always willing to listen and help me through difficult days.

We did many interesting things together. I helped her teach OT students during their clinicals, and we made teaching videos together. Some of my favorite activities were making food and working on art projects, which she patiently helped me create.

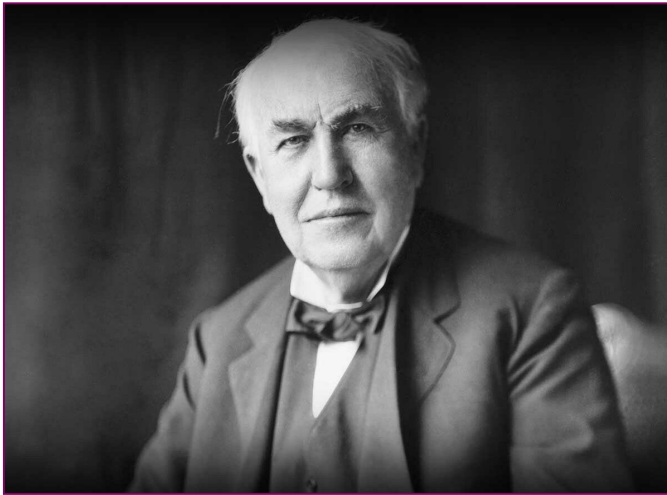
Now that she has retired, I am a little sad, but I am also very grateful that she was my occupational therapist. She turned what could have been a boring necessity into a fun activity that I looked forward to every week.



A Brilliant Mind Beyond the Silence

Michelle Sandiford

Thomas Edison was born in 1847. Early teachers labeled him difficult or “addled,” prompting his mother to homeschool him. Modern biographers and researchers have suggested that he may have had mild dyslexia or other learning differences, although formal diagnoses were not available at the time.



Edison developed a severe hearing impairment during childhood, which became almost complete by his teenage years. He often attributed his hearing loss to childhood scarlet fever or recurring ear infections. However, he also blamed a train incident in which he was lifted by his ears. Eventually, he became completely deaf in one ear and lost approximately 80% of his hearing in the other.

Edison said that his deafness helped him avoid trivial conversations and block out distracting noises, allowing him to focus deeply on his research. He also used bone conduction, such as biting down on a phonograph or piano, to perceive sound vibrations and assess audio frequencies.

Edison invented the first practical electric light bulb that could be mass-produced and used in homes. He also developed other components needed for practical electric lighting, including safety fuses and on/off switches for light sockets. Despite his hearing loss, he often credited it with helping him concentrate on his numerous inventions.

Thomas Edison died on October 18, 1931, at his home, Glenmont, in West Orange, New Jersey.

R.A.D.D: From A Vision to My Purpose

Shevie Barnes

R.A.D.D.—Rising Against Disabilities & Discrimination—is more than the name of my nonprofit. It represents nearly two decades of my life, growth, and commitment to disability advocacy.

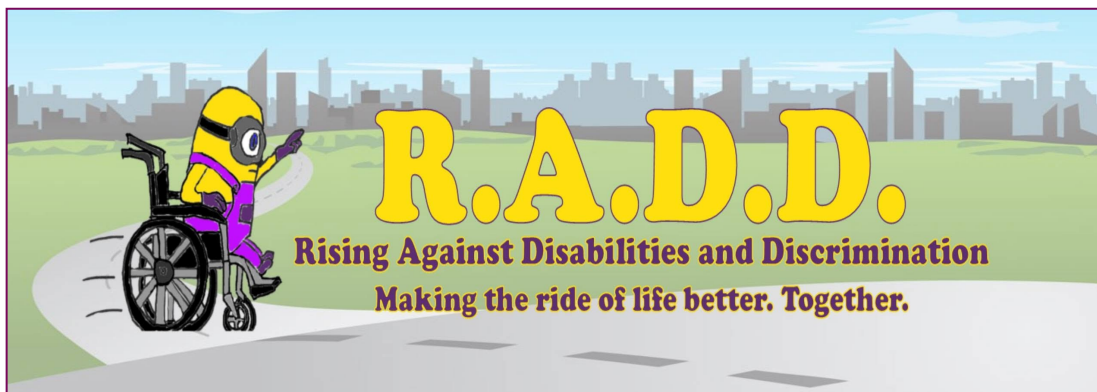
I first created R.A.D.D. in 2006 with a desire to stand against the discrimination and barriers faced by people with disabilities. At the time, I could not have imagined how much that vision would grow—or how much I would grow with it. What began as an idea has now become my own nonprofit organization and a reflection of the advocate and leader I have become.

Over the years, I have learned that advocacy is more than speaking up when something is wrong. It is showing up, educating others, challenging stereotypes, mentoring the next generation, and making sure people with disabilities have a seat at the table. My journey has allowed me to advocate at the Capitol, connect with leaders, serve my disability community, and use my experiences to help others recognize the power of their own voices.

R.A.D.D. carries all those experiences with it.

For me, this nonprofit is about creating the change I needed to see when I began advocating in 2006. I want the generation coming behind me to face fewer barriers, have greater opportunities, and never question whether their voices matter.

R.A.D.D. started as a vision. Twenty years later, it has become part of my legacy—and we are just getting started!



Games Are Building More Inclusive Communities

JJ Humphrey

Walk into a local game store on a tournament night, and you may see something that surprises you: players with a wide variety of disabilities enjoying tabletop games alongside other gamers. Games such as *Star Wars: Legion*, *Warhammer*, and trading card games (TCGs) like *Lorcana* can provide an engaging and accessible way for people to connect, compete, and express themselves.



For some disabled players, miniature games offer hands-on experiences that can be easier to engage with than purely digital games. Moving miniatures, organizing cards, building armies, painting models, and planning turns can provide tactile and visual ways to interact with the game. The ability to play at a comfortable pace, use accommodations, and communicate with other players can also make tabletop gaming a welcoming social activity.

The benefits go beyond the game itself. Local gaming communities can help players build friendships, practice communication, develop strategic thinking, and find a place where their interests are shared and respected. Inclusive gaming also gives disabled players opportunities to participate as competitors, hobbyists, artists, collectors, and community members.

Getting started can be simple. Visit a local game or card shop and ask about beginner nights, learn-to-play events, or organized play. Many stores have players willing to teach newcomers. For *Star Wars: Legion* or *Warhammer*, beginners can start with a small force or introductory set rather than purchasing everything at once. TCG players can ask about starter decks, beginner events, or casual games.

Most importantly, newcomers should ask about available accommodations and let the gaming community know what helps them participate comfortably. There is room at the table for everyone!

Have you ever wondered why something that seems easy for everyone else can feel difficult for you? Having a disability can affect more than school or learning—it can also affect your mental health.

[illegible]

Having a disability does not mean there is something wrong with you. Sometimes, life may require you to work harder at things that come naturally to others. That can be frustrating, but it can also teach you more about yourself.

A horizontal sequence of 12 colored circles. The circles alternate in color: purple, yellow, purple, yellow, purple, yellow, purple, yellow, purple, yellow, purple, and finally a yellow circle containing the number 7.

Life as A Scare Actor with A Disability

James Kuhlman

Happy spooky season, everyone!

My name is James Kuhlman, and I am a brand-new scare actor with the “Demon Squad” at *Howl-O-Scream SeaWorld Orlando*. My scare-actor name is “Transforming Demon!”

Life as a scare actor and scaring the butts off everyone who passes by me is a whole lot of fun. I think one reason scare acting is so enjoyable for me is because I find it very stimulating for my ADHD and autism. It gives me a chance to be creative, stay active, and have fun while entertaining other people.

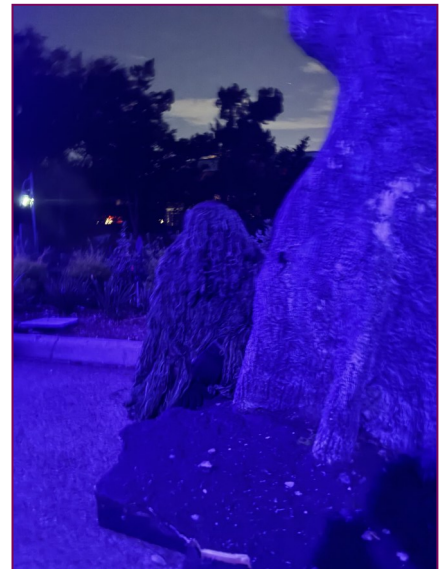


Scare acting is also in my blood. For those who don’t know, my mom used to be a scare actor at *Halloween Horror Nights* at Universal a few years ago. She passed her love of scare acting and haunted-house design down to me, so getting the opportunity to do this myself is really special.

One interesting thing about being a member of the Demon Squad is that I don’t know what position I’ll be doing until I clock in for my shift. Because of that, I go over everything with my stage manager and fellow scare actors each time. We talk about what I should do, tips for the house or zone, and the rules for my role.

Other than that, I absolutely love being a scare actor. I couldn’t imagine doing anything else this spooky season!

If you live in or are visiting the Orlando area, come to *Howl-O-Scream* and let me scare the butts off you, your family, and your friends!





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 who 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 our website at floridayouthcouncil.org/join. The program is open to application year-round.

We hope to hear from you soon!



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