Welcome

In January 2018, we welcomed a new Executive Director to FHFOA.

Mrs. Laci Polotzola is a wife and mother of two sons, one of whom has Autism. She completed Partners in Policymaking in 2012. Mrs. Polotzola was an advocate for early intervention services in St. Landry Parish and helped to get Pediatric Therapy services started in Opelousas, Louisiana. Before taking on the role of Executive Director, Mrs. Polotzola served as the Region 4 LaCAN Leader. Through her personal and professional life, her advocacy for individuals with disabilities has proven to be one of the greatest assets to helping our families.

Words from Laci Polotzola:

“I am very excited for the opportunity to serve as Executive Director of Families Helping Families of Acadiana. I look forward to working with our partners, community resources and families throughout Acadiana to make sure all people with disabilities and their family members are aware of the different services and resources that are available to them.

I welcome any and everyone to contact us or stop by our office to find out what we do and how we can work together to make Acadiana a more inclusive community.”
The Louisiana Department of Health’s Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities will host a series of statewide community meetings for individuals with developmental disabilities who are on the agency’s waiting list for home and community-based waiver services. There are 20 meetings scheduled in 13 communities, beginning on March 20 in Pineville.

The meetings will allow people who are waiting for community-based waiver services to learn about OCDD’s efforts to change its service delivery system to a new tiered waiver system. Previously, waivers were offered on a first come, first serve basis. The process is being changed so that an individual with a greater urgency of need will be prioritized for services.

The Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities, in partnership with regional Families Helping Families, stakeholders and other agencies that assist people with developmental disabilities, will be in attendance at the meeting.

Currently, there are more than 16,000 people on the waiting list that is formally called the Request for Services Registry (RFSR) for the New Opportunities Waiver (NOW). This list has been in place for more than 20 years and is now at an all-time high.

**How it Works**

Beginning in October 2016, the Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities conducted a screening initiative to determine the urgency of need of those individuals who were on the Registry. To date, more than 9,400 of those individuals have been screened. The screening initiative uses a nationally-accepted best practice and gave the agency an understanding of the needs of each individual on the list.

The screening process identified people who would benefit from non-waiver services and referred those people to the appropriate service providers. Typically, these services are less costly than the benefits offered under the NOW waiver.

Individuals who do not need services immediately will remain on the list in their proper order.

“To address the existing number of individuals on the waiting list, it would cost nearly $832 million in new state and federal dollars,” said LDH deputy secretary Michelle Alletto. “Knowing those dollars would likely not be available in the near term, our agency took an innovative approach to improve services by developing a new tiered waiver system. By making the appropriate services available to people at the right time in their lives, we can offer services to more people while best utilizing our limited dollars.”

Mark A. Thomas, assistant secretary for the Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities said his staff worked with stakeholders representing the Developmental Disabilities Council, Families Helping Families, ARC of Louisiana, and individuals and families to develop this new approach to getting people the services they need when they need them.

“We call this a tiered waiver service delivery system,” said Thomas. “We believe this new system is a comprehensive plan to assist individuals and family members who have the most urgent and emergent needs, and who have been waiting for services for a long time.”

For a complete listing of the OCDD community meetings, visit [www.ldh.louisiana.gov/systemtransformation](http://www.ldh.louisiana.gov/systemtransformation).
LaCAN (Louisiana Council’s Advocacy Network) furthers the Council’s mission by advocating for policies and systems that support inclusion everywhere people learn, work, live, and play. LaCAN advocates for service systems that support children and adults with disabilities to live in their own homes and be fully-included and participating members of their local schools and communities.

LaCAN provides information and support to individuals wishing to effectively advocate for systems change in the areas of home and community-based services, education, and employment. Regional LaCAN teams include individuals with disabilities, their family members, and professionals. These members are notified by email or phone when communication with state agency officials, legislators or the Governor is necessary.

BENEFITS TO MEMBERSHIP

You can help improve the systems that serve individuals with developmental disabilities by joining the LaCAN and participating in its advocacy efforts. There are no dues or fees to join and your activity level is up to you. Here are just a few of the benefits to joining LaCAN:

CONNECTION - become a part of a regional team of advocates

INFORMATION - receive current information on proposed policy changes and how those changes may affect you and others

TRAINING - learn skills to effectively advocate for systems change

SUPPORT - receive assistance from a regional LaCAN Leader who will link you with your policymakers and support your advocacy efforts.

Welcome

Jamie Duplechine
Region 4
LaCAN Leader

Jamie Duplechine, the new Region 4 LaCAN Team Leader, is not new to advocacy. She has been honored to represent the great state of Louisiana as the past titleholder of Ms. Wheelchair Louisiana for both the Ms. Wheelchair America and Ms. Wheelchair USA organizations in years 2015 and 2017. She is a certified peer mentor through both United Spinal Association and the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation.

In 2015 and 2016 she took the opportunity to advocate on Capitol Hill in Washington DC with United Spinal Association for their annual “Roll on Capitol Hill” event.

She is an honorary board member of the Brain Injury/United Spinal Associations of Louisiana and the Secretary of Louisiana’s Statewide Independent Living Council. She was the recipient of the Lafayette Parish Outstanding Individual with a Disability Award and the Patsy Barrett Memorial Award in 2016. In 2017, she completed Louisiana’s Partners in Policymaking. She is excited about her new role as team leader and looks forward to working with the DD Council, other leaders, LaCAN members, and policymakers.
MARCH IS DD AWARENESS MONTH
‘See Me for Me’

Look beyond someone’s disability and see them as a person,
Not just a person with a disability.

Follow the Council all month on social media and share your own stories highlighting how people with and without disabilities come together to form strong, diverse communities.

LaCAN Action Alerts
Click link below to see the latest action alerts

Public Testimony will be April 10th.
Members are encouraged to attend.
Contact your LaCAN Leader for more details.
What Families Can Do to Avoid “Surprise” Medical Bills?

Most families with CYSHCN are familiar with managed care and understand that they have better health care coverage if they stay within their plan’s network. However, even when families go to network hospitals, they are sometimes hit with surprise medical bills.

How Does This Happen?
Even if a hospital is in a family’s plan network, not all of the providers who provide services at the hospital may be in the network. It is important that parents know if individual doctors are also participating in the plan. This can be important to know for routine visits to a children’s hospital as well as for in-patient or emergency care.

In-Patient Care
Parents may have been diligent in finding both a hospital and also a provider who works there in their plan’s network. However, if their child needs surgery or other care, it is possible that the anesthesiologist, for example, may not be participating in their plan. Then the family receives an “out-of-network” bill.

Emergency Care
The situation is even more difficult during an emergency. Families may have to go to the nearest hospital or perhaps get admitted or transferred to a hospital that may be out-of-network.

What Can Families Do?
Use in-network hospitals.
For medical appointments, check that the providers at the hospital are also in-network.
If using Medicaid as secondary payor, get an out-of-state authorization. NOTE: Even non-participating providers can bill Medicaid out-of-network as secondary to private insurance.
File a complaint, see https://consumersunion.org/insurance-complaint-tool/.

Families need to be vigilant about using in-network providers to ensure that their insurance will cover medical services. Plans should make information on network providers “transparent”, or disclose estimated costs out-of-network, so families don’t get unexpected medical bills. Some states have proposed protections, including for self-funded/self-insured plans. For more information on what families and advocates can do, see Resources below.
“My children are the reason I laugh, smile and want to get up every morning”.  
Gena Lee Nolin

Children Special Health Services

Did you know…Studies have shown that individuals with disabilities are more likely than people without disabilities to report:

● Poorer overall health.

● Less access to adequate health care.

● Physical inactivity.

People with disabilities need health care and health programs for the same reasons anyone else does—to stay well, active, and a part of the community.

Although a smaller percentage than people without disabilities, most people with disabilities report their health to be good, very good, or excellent. Being healthy means the same thing for all of us—getting and staying well so we can lead full, active lives. That means having the tools and information to make healthy choices and knowing how to prevent illness. For people with disabilities, it also means knowing that health problems related to a disability can be treated. These problems (also called secondary conditions) can include pain, depression, and a greater risk for certain illnesses.

YOUR HEALTH MATTERS TO CHILDREN SPECIAL HEALTH SERVICES

Have questions about health issues? Call Rose@ 337-262-5616 x 123
Resources
Louisiana Department of Education
www.louisianabelieves.com

Exceptional Lives - Louisiana
La.exceptionallives.org

Louisiana Parent Training and Information Center
https://fhfofgno.org/laptic

Understood.org

Center for Parent Information and Resources
www.parentcenterhub.org

Wrightslaw.com
PARENTS’ IEP
BILL OF RIGHTS

♦ YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO have the IEP written within 30 days of the completed evaluation.

♦ YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO know who will be attending the IEP meeting.

♦ YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO bring your child and have anyone else you wish to attend.

♦ YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO have the meeting at your convenience, with no time limits. Stay till satisfied.

♦ YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO stop the meeting and reconvene at a later date.

♦ YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO have the information presented to you in language or form you understand.

♦ YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO ask questions. You are an equal member of the IEP team.

♦ YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO disagree. Your opinions are important. You know your child best.

♦ YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO tape the meeting.

♦ YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO a copy of the completed IEP.
FAMILIES HELPING FAMILIES OF ACADIANA HAS SOME DURABLE MEDICAL EQUIPMENT ON HAND AT OUR OFFICE.

ITEMS SUCH AS DIAPERS, TUBINGS, WALKERS, FEEDING ITEMS AND MORE.

PLEASE CALL OUR OFFICE: 855-984-3458 TO SEE IF WE HAVE ITEMS THAT YOU CAN POSSIBLY USE. ALSO, IF YOU HAVE EXTRA ITEMS YOU DO NOT NEED, PLEASE CONSIDER DONATING THEM TO OUR OFFICE SO OTHER FAMILIES CAN RECEIVE.
WHAT’S GOING ON IN REGION 4

Lafayette Consolidated Government Parks & Recreation Department Therapeutic Recreation

Camp We Can Do
Heymann Recreation Center
1500 S. Orange St.
June 4, 2018- July 25, 2018
Monday – Friday 9:00am – 4:00pm
Holiday Break July 2-July 6, 2018

For more information, please contact: Recreation & Parks Department (337) 291-8127
Camp registration form will become available on or about April 14, 2018 at lafayettela.gov
Also from Lafayette Consolidated Government:
TR Prom: April 21st, @ Heymann Rec Center 1500 S Orange St, 6:30-9:30 ages 16 and older

2018 WALK FOR HOPE AND FAMILY FUN DAY
April 7 @ 8:00 am—12:00 p.m.

Walk For Hope is an annual family oriented event which aims to increase autism awareness while raising funds to support people with autism and their families. Money raised allows Autism Society Acadiana to provide stipends for families to attend autism-related seminars/conferences; award mini-grants for teachers and professionals; and host local conferences/workshops/trainings on autism topics.
Proceeds also support our administrative office and resource library.
We strive to make a positive impact on families affected by autism, assisting them as they travel along in their journey.

FAMILIES HELPING FAMILIES OF ACADIANA WILL BE GOING TO EACH PARISH IN REGION FOUR DURING APRIL AND MAY.
WE INVITE ALL OF OUR FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY TO STOP BY.
CHECK OUR WEBSITE AND FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA TO SEE WHERE WE WILL BE AND WHEN.
Tour Goals:
Assist individuals with disabilities and their families
Partner with community providers to connect them with families
Educate the community about programs, services and rights for individuals with disabilities
Invest in Families Helping Families of Acadiana

Families Helping Families of Acadiana is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that relies on donations to meet the needs of our agency’s mission. You can help FHF invest in individuals with disabilities by making your tax deductible donation for any amount you wish.

Consider making a donation in memory of a loved one, to thank a special person or simply to show your support for the work we do. When you make a donation, you are supporting an organization that promotes a better life and future for individuals with disabilities and their families.

How to make a tax deductible donation:

* Check Payable to:
  Families Helping Families of Acadiana
  100 Benman Road, Lafayette, La. 70506

* Go to the Donations page on our website, www.fhfacadiana.org, and charge your donation to your credit card with Paypal.

Once we receive your donation, you will receive a letter acknowledging your donation and giving you our tax ID number for income tax purposes.

Thanks for your support!