

# New Horizons

Housing That Supports Independence



**Tracee Battis**  
Executive Director

**Norman A. Smith**  
Assoc. Executive Director

**Stephen J. Schaefer**  
Chief Financial Officer

## Present Locations

Freedom I, Robbinsville

Project Freedom at Hamilton

Project Freedom at Lawrence

Freedom Village at Woodstown

Freedom Village at Hopewell

Freedom Village at Toms River

Freedom Village at West Windsor

Freedom Village at Westampton

Freedom Village at Gibbsboro

Freedom Village at Town Center South

## Under Construction

Freedom Village at Hamilton Woods

## ***Ed Department Prods Schools On Compensatory Services For Students With Disabilities***

*Reprinted from Disability Scoop by Michelle Diamant | February 22, 2022*

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights issued a new fact sheet last week doubling down on the responsibilities schools have under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the law requires that students with disabilities are provided appropriate evaluations and services, the guidance indicates, adding that the right to a free appropriate public education remains intact "regardless of the challenges schools face."

In circumstances where students do not receive the services they should, federal officials say that schools must convene a group to determine if compensatory services are required. This could mean making up for physical therapy that a child lost out on during school closures or services for a student who did not receive a timely evaluation, according to the fact sheet.

"Providing compensatory services to a student does not draw into question a school's good faith efforts during these difficult circumstances," the guidance indicates. "It is a remedy that recognizes the reality that students experience injury when they do not receive appropriate and timely initial evaluations, re-evaluations, or services, including the services that the school had previously determined they were entitled to, regardless of the reason."

Decisions about whether compensatory services are warranted and to what degree should be made by people who are knowledgeable about the student, federal officials said. They ought to consider the frequency and duration of missed services, if the services that were provided were appropriate to the student's individual needs as well as the child's performance and rate of progress, among other factors.

"The new fact sheet differs from previous guidance in that it directly addresses the requirement to offer compensatory services, acknowledging that these services may be necessary even when a school has acted in good faith in working with students and their families to provide equal access and FAPE," the spokesperson said.

A survey of parents across the country released last fall by the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, or COPAA, found that only 18% of students with disabilities had been offered compensatory services despite widespread concerns from families about learning loss, regression or slower than expected progress toward goals since the onset of the pandemic.

"We do continue to hear that families are struggling," said Denise Marshall, CEO of COPAA, which works to advocate for the rights of students with disabilities and their families. "I certainly hope the guidance helps — and I urge families who don't find that to be the case and are still struggling to submit OCR complaints."

# ***Students Find Common Ground Through Unified Sports***

Reprinted from DisAbility Scoop by Matt Szabo, Daily Pilot/TNS | April 5, 2022

COSTA MESA, Calif. — Louis Zaffino is a senior outside hitter for the Marina High boys' volleyball team. He got to represent his school in a different facet on a recent Thursday morning. He got his swings in, but he also yelled support to Vikings special education freshmen Moses Castaneda and Skylar Swanson as they tried to hit an oversized plastic volleyball over the net at Edison High.

The Huntington Beach Union High School District's Unified Sports volleyball tournament was back. Six players were on the court at a time for each team, three adapted physical education athletes (students with intellectual disabilities) and three student partners without intellectual disabilities.

Who was who didn't really matter. All that mattered was the team at the event sponsored by Special Olympics Orange County.

Winning helps, too. Marina swept the varsity and junior varsity divisions at the Unified Sports tournament. In the varsity division, the Vikings rallied to edge Westminster 20-19 in the championship match.

Marina's winning varsity team consisted of Zaffino, Castaneda, Swanson, Mia Mariano, Riley Keany, Marlee Ware, Kerolos Davis and Ramsey Garcia. Mariano, a senior, is a varsity girls' volleyball player for the Vikings, who also had their volleyball team captains in each gender — Maci Hendry and Joseph Nuñez — assisting the junior varsity.

ASB students also teamed up with special education students on many of the rosters at the tournament, which also saw Fountain Valley, Ocean View and host Edison competing.

"It's totally life-affirming, what's happening, seeing people smile and clap," said Marina special education teacher Butch Fredlow, one of two of the Vikings' Unified Sports liaisons along with Jen Letterman. "It was perfect. It was really a great day. For a lot of the kids in our program, they're never going to be able to walk into a gym with a band playing for them, announcers, scoreboards, people cheering for them. Getting that athletic experience, even on a smaller level, is such a confidence boost."

Each of the district high schools takes turns hosting a Unified Sports event throughout the year. The ones remaining in 2021-22 are a soccer tournament at Fountain Valley High in April, and a track and field meet at Marina High in May.

The March event was high-energy throughout, with an opening ceremony, a DJ and someone making balloon animals. Ocean View teacher Courtney Gillett, the district liaison, said the events are good for special education and general education students alike. "Sometimes these high schoolers don't see outside of themselves," Gillett said. "I see on my campus, after they've played on a team, they're knuckling or high-fiving their friends. They become friends. All of the barriers are taken away, and it really focuses on friendship and competition."

Edison High has the largest special education population among the district's high schools. Edison Special Abilities Cluster administrator Joe Loomis said the program has about 200 total high school and young adult students.

It was a total school affair at the recent event. Edison's band, cheerleading team and song team all participated, with the choir performing the national anthem and the American Sign Language club signing it. Edison teachers also brought their students into the gym to witness the tournament. "The idea is to promote relationships and friendships, and being inclusive," Loomis said. "I think our gen ed and special ed students learn from each other. I know my students look forward to these events more than anything."

# ***How Families Are Advocating For Children With Disabilities In Foster Care***

*By Claudia Boyd-Barrett, reprinted from the California Health Report | April 21, 2022*

FRESNO, Calif. — Sheri Louie fell in love with Kristina the moment she saw her at the group home for medically fragile children in Fresno. A licensed vocational nurse, Louie had spent years working with children like Kristina who need special medical equipment to stay alive. But something about the fragile baby with expressive eyes felt unique. “I had a connection with her. It was more like how I felt with my daughter,” said Louie, whose biological daughter, Cynthia, is one year older than Kristina. “I loved all the kids there, but I loved Kristina different.”

Kristina has cerebral palsy, autism and Moebius syndrome, a neurological disorder that causes facial paralysis. She’s one of thousands of children with physical and developmental disabilities who enter California’s foster care system each year. These children often require specialized care, therapy and education services. Because of their disabilities, they can be harder to place with a foster or adoptive family — now called a “resource family” by the state — than children without disabilities.

Yet, like Louie and her husband, Kenny, many families do foster and ultimately adopt children with special health care needs. That’s despite challenges these families often encounter, such as receiving insufficient medical supplies to care for the children and incomplete information from child welfare agencies about the children’s health histories. Foster families and their advocates are working to mend the gaps in the system that can cause undue stress on these children with disabilities, who, in most cases, have already been through trying times before coming into foster care. Because the children are considered wards of the state, advocates say that California should do more to protect them and ensure their health conditions are well managed. This is also a racial justice issue, because Black and Native American children are disproportionately enrolled in foster care, due to societal inequities.

Recent efforts by the state to improve supports for foster children and resource families, as well as streamline access to services for kids with disabilities and youth with mental health needs could help. A new phone line called the Family Urgent Response System provides 24/7 phone support to foster children and their caregivers, and a mobile response team in each county can visit families in crisis. California health and social service officials are also working to implement a 2018 bill that calls for better integration of care for children in the child welfare system who are receiving services from multiple public agencies.

But there’s more work to do to ensure the needs of foster children with disabilities don’t fall through the cracks, said Susanna Kniffen, senior manager of child welfare policy at Children Now, a children’s advocacy organization. In particular, she said, the county agencies that oversee foster placements need to do a better job of screening the children in their care for disabilities to ensure problems get identified early and kids get the appropriate support. Greater funding to hire more social workers who can oversee this and for the foster system generally would help, Kniffen said.

## **‘You want the child to have the best life that they can’**

Most children in the foster care system have suffered some form of abuse, neglect or trauma. Reports suggest children born with disabilities are more likely to be abused or enter the child welfare system, and that the trauma of experiencing abuse and neglect, as well as entering foster care, can also increase the risk of health challenges. Largely due to structural inequality and racism, Black and Native American children are more than three times as likely as white and Latin children to be in foster care in California.

Rosemary Schulman of Culver City didn’t know anything about fetal alcohol syndrome when she adopted her son, M., at age 2, and later her daughter, B. (Their names have been withheld to protect their identities.) In fact, it took until her son was 15 years old, and her daughter 8 for them to receive fetal alcohol spectrum disorder diagnoses.

M. began to show signs of hyperactivity, social immaturity and learning difficulties when he started school, and B had a speech delay and fell behind academically. Shulman eventually discovered her children’s fetal alcohol exposure after digging into their family histories, through self-education and medical assessments. She believes county social workers either withheld or failed to notice important information about her children’s medical histories that could have alerted her to the disorders sooner.

## *From Norman's Desk*

It is May! It is time for my annual rant as we near Hurricane Season.

It is time to once again focus on the looming hurricane season and the predictions by the Colorado State University tropical study program. Locally, we went through an horrendous year in 2021 with four Tropical Storms impacting New Jersey with heavy rains and tornados. As reported last month, three of these storms hit us within a span of 14 days. So, being aware of the potential for hurricane season is the first step in preparing for it

This is the 39th year that the hurricane research team at the Department of Atmospheric Science, Colorado State University has issued the Atlantic basin seasonal hurricane forecast. Dr. William Gray, PhD., launched the report in 1984 and continued to be an author on them until his death in 2016. His team is now headed by Dr. Philip J. Klotzbach, PhD.



Dr. Klotzbach's team's initial prediction this year is for a total of 19 named storms with nine hurricanes and four of them becoming major hurricanes. This is very similar to last year's prediction was 17 named storms. They are forecasting nine hurricanes, one more than last year with four reaching the major hurricane threshold. The actual number for the 2021 season was 21 named storms; seven of these storms turned into hurricanes with four being major in power and scale. Of the 21 storms, 12 of them made landfall in the US breaking the record of 11 set in 2021. But last year broke the five-year streak of at least one category five hurricane forming.

The CSU prediction also estimates the probabilities of at least one major hurricane making landfall: For the Entire U.S. coastline – 71%. Last year it was 69%, but in 2019 it was only 48%. For the U.S. East Coast including Peninsula Florida the prediction remains at 47%, up by 2% in 2021 but way up from 28% for 2019.

In sum, it looks like a busier summer and fall with tropical storms and hurricanes, and we have the potential of another horrendous season if these predictions are too low as happened in 2020. CSU's April forecasts have been validated 56% of the time since 2014. With this year's prediction in mind and remembering what we went through last year it is not too early to start thinking about severe weather and being prepared for it. The first step is being more aware of both the potential threat and the "emergent" or imminent threat. Here is what FEMA recommends that people with disabilities do to address that need.

### ***Severe Weather Preparedness for People with Disabilities***

It is important to know in advance what steps you need to take to keep yourself and your family safe.

Do you know the best way to get emergency alerts and warnings? If you have a disability that affects your communication, identify the best ways for you to access emergency information in advance. What television stations in your area offer live captioning? Can you sign up for text, email, or telephone alerts through your municipality? Keep phones and communication devices charged, and always have a backup way of learning about emergencies. Some options for alerts and warnings are listed below.

- Television stations with live captioning
- Emergency Weather Radio (some can support strobe lights, bed shakers and text readouts)
- Wireless Emergency Alerts – If you are in an area where the alerts are available and have a cell phone that is equipped to receive them, you may automatically receive a text message when an emergency alert is issued.
- Smartphone applications – Many smartphone apps will provide text and audio weather alerts. You can set the locations and types of alerts you would like to receive.
- Social Media – If social media is accessible for you, look for local emergency management agencies and news stations that also use social media to broadcast alerts and warnings. Save these organizations to your 'favorites' or begin 'following' them in advance.
- Local warning systems – Many localities have emergency alert services that will provide alert information to you in a format of your choice. Most locations can send messages to email addresses, mobile phones (text or voice),

landline phones, TTYs and Braille readers. Contact your local emergency management agency to learn what options may be available in your community.

- Support network- Talk to trusted friends, family and neighbors and create a plan to notify each other of emergency information.

After determining how you will be notified of an emergency, put together an emergency plan and kit. Involve your friends, family, neighbors, support staff and anyone else that you trust to assist you. Determine how you will contact them in an emergency and what they can do to assist you. Think about where you will take shelter in your home if you need to. Also consider any services you need (personal care assistance services, dialysis services, etc.) and how you will access those services in an emergency. Talk to provider agencies about their emergency plans.

***Learn more about preparing for severe weather at [www.ready.gov/severe-weather](http://www.ready.gov/severe-weather).***

---

## ***Jadhav Family Donations Benefit Organic Farm Program***

The very generous and community-minded Jadhav family were once again at Project Freedom last month as son Shawnak gifted his first paycheck of \$200 from the Kumon School to our Organic Farm program.

His sister, Zoya Jadhav, made a similar donation to last year after placing second in the Peace Islands Institute Art and Essay Competition with her submission titled: "Amity Amidst a Crisis."

The very popular Organic Farm program provide fresh organically grown vegetables to all of Project Freedom's Mercer-based complexes, and it is supported through donations from supporters such as the Jadhav family.



## ***Patrice Jetter Stars in Netflix "Worn Stories" Episode***

For those of you who have a Netflix account, check out Episode 5 "Uniforms" of the Netflix series entitled "Worn Stories."

Patrice Jetter, long-time Hamilton tenant, gold-medalists at the national Special Olympics, artist, and advocate, is featured as she wears her long-sought-after crossing guard uniform.

Patrice's portion of this episode is divided into two appearances, so watch this interesting show about how wearers of uniforms feel about them. But, honestly, Patrice steals the show!

According to Patrice, Netflix is interested in filming her again to focus on living with a disability.

They recently returned to PF at Hamilton to film Patrice leading Hamilton's "Passion Paint" event coordinated by the Hamilton staff, Tanja Silver and Jennifer Grantham.

## ***Social Security Reopening Offices Nationwide***

*Reprinted from Disability Scoop / by Michelle Diament | April 5, 2022*

Social Security offices across the country are about to open their doors for the first time in more than two years. The Social Security Administration said that field offices will reopen to the public for in-person services beginning Thursday, April 7. Appointments will not be necessary, but they are recommended to reduce wait times.

Social Security closed its more than 1,200 offices in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic in what agency officials described as an effort to protect employees and beneficiaries, many of whom are at high risk from the virus. Nearly all of the agency's business with the public has been conducted by phone, online and through the mail since that point.

Field offices were expected to reopen earlier this year, but concerns from labor unions representing Social Security employees pushed things back. "Given that many of the people we serve have health vulnerabilities, and consistent with our union agreements, we are continuing to require certain safety measures including masking, physical distancing and self-health checks for COVID-19 symptoms," said Kilolo Kijakazi, acting commissioner of the Social Security Administration. "We will provide masks to the public and employees if they need them."

Over 69 million Americans receive monthly payments from Social Security, including 8 million Supplemental Security Income beneficiaries, many of whom have disabilities.

---

## ***Senators Say Social Security Needs A Beneficiary Advocate***

*Reprinted from Disability Scoop by Michelle Diament | April 12, 2022*

Much like there is a taxpayer advocate to speak up for average Americans at the Internal Revenue Service, a group of senators say that Social Security beneficiaries — including those with disabilities — deserve a voice at that agency too.

In a recent letter to President Joe Biden, U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, Ron Wyden, D-Ore., and Bob Casey, D-Pa., say that the Social Security Administration needs a beneficiary advocate. The senators said that the role should be modeled on the existing taxpayer advocate position at the IRS, which is an independent organization within the agency that helps taxpayers resolve problems.

"The (Social Security Administration) lacks a voice to represent beneficiaries, especially in internal considerations for how to respond to problems and solve ongoing issues," the senators said in their letter to Biden. "We urge you to create a taxpayer advocate-like position at SSA to ensure that beneficiaries have a stronger, dedicated voice in agency operations. Such a position will help our government continue to carry out the solemn commitment Social Security represents to the American people."

Problems with Social Security have escalated during the pandemic, the letter notes. Field offices nationwide were closed until recently and the senators indicate that millions of calls to the agency have gone unanswered while stacks of mail remain unopened. However, even before the emergence of COVID-19, the letter notes that "the agency has long struggled to conduct outreach to families caring for disabled children."

Currently, more than 69 million Americans receive monthly payments from Social Security, including 8 million Supplemental Security Income beneficiaries, many of whom have disabilities.

"People with disabilities rely on the Social Security Administration for many benefits, but they and their families frequently struggle to get answers or have problems sorted out," said Gary Tonks, president and CEO of The Arc of Ohio. "A beneficiary advocate at the Social Security Administration would help address the problems that people with disabilities and others face when trying to access or maintain benefits."

## **Another Published Author Among Us**

By Judy Wilkinson, Associate Editor

I have heard it said that great writing comes from personal experience and true knowledge of a subject... If true, I believe this novel fits that bill.

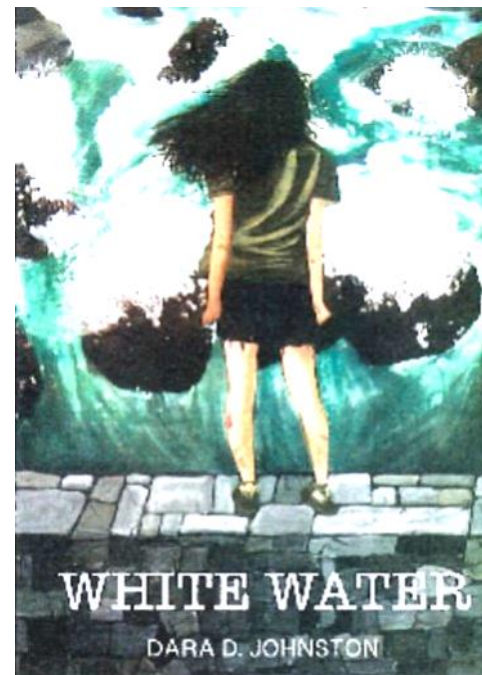
In her first novel, *White Water*, Dara Johnston takes us on a fictional journey to another life, one she lived first hand as a child living on the precipice of a raging river in Tennessee's Smokey Mountains.

Born in Maine, Dara's parents divorced when she was 7 years old. She moved with her mom and eight children to a small town called Townsend, located on the swift moving Little River in Tennessee. Within a year she found herself back in Maine with her two brothers, father and new wife. Briefly though it was, her childhood experiences in Tennessee deeply influenced her and set the stage for this stimulating story flavored by life in the Tennessee mountains.

After completing a double major in PE and music from the University of Maine, Dara launched several high school teaching and coaching careers, plus a stint singing and playing guitar in clubs up and down the East Coast. She then continued her musical education at Berklee College of Music. A master of Science in Management earned while working at AT&T led Dara to a real estate position and ultimately to her present position as a Regional Property Manager for Woodstown, Westampton, Gibbsboro and Tom's River campuses of Project Freedom.

One to never let any grass grow under her feet, besides authoring a novel, Dara is passionately involved with teaching dance...West Coast Swing, Line Dancing, Country Two Step and Nite Club 2, in her (spare) time.

Her book is available on Amazon.




---

## **Children with Disabilities in Foster Care** Continued from page 3

Jennifer and Patrick Haskew of Los Angeles have fostered several young children with disabilities, and now have an adopted son, Theo, with fetal alcohol syndrome, intellectual disability and autism. Jennifer Haskew said the couple did receive training through a foster agency on how to care for children with disabilities, but it wasn't enough to prepare them for the reality of it. This included an intense year as foster parents to a boy with ADHD and oppositional defiant disorder, and his 5-year-old sister who had an intellectual disability. Neither had received formal diagnoses when they arrived at the Haskew house and it took months to get them stabilized with services and special education, Jennifer Haskew said. "Nobody's handing this information to you," Haskew said. "Advocacy is a huge aspect (of taking care of foster children with disabilities) that you don't know until you get into it. Then you find out you're often the only one advocating for these kids."

One promising development for foster kids and resource families in California is the state's new Family Urgent Response System. The helpline and mobile response system was approved by the legislature in 2019 but delayed due to the pandemic. It finally rolled out last summer, and calls to the helpline have been steadily increasing, Kniffen said. The toll-free hotline is staffed by counselors trained in conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques and who can help children who are struggling with a foster care placement, and caregivers who need help or resources. Hotline staff can also send out a mobile response team to help families and youth in crisis.

Implementation of Assembly Bill 2083, which seeks to improve service integration, as well as a state effort known as CalAIM which includes a work group focused on recommending improvements to mental health services for youth insured under Medi-Cal, could also benefit foster children with disabilities.

Meanwhile, resource and adoptive parents are doing their best to provide for the children in their care.

## May 2022

***NJCCD Hybrid Quarterly Meeting*** May 12 / 10:00 am - 1:30 pm  
Hilton Garden Inn Hamilton, 800 US Highway 130 Hamilton Township, NJ 08690 United States

### Free

To register for In-Person meeting, please send an email with your contact information:

[Jacinta.williams@njcdd.org](mailto:Jacinta.williams@njcdd.org)

To register for the Hybrid meeting, please use this link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WNGSkXylztSAKKDn9AzCnHKQ> However, we encourage you to submit written public comments or questions to [Jacinta.williams@njcdd.org](mailto:Jacinta.williams@njcdd.org) by Wednesday May 11, 2022.

***Self-Directed Services in NJ Virtual Public Forum*** May 12 / 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm

### Free

The Regional Family Support Planning Council #6 (Ocean and Monmouth) cordially invites you to our virtual public forum on Self-Directed Services. Self-Directed Services (also called Self-Direction) is an alternative to the traditional provider-managed service model. It offers increased flexibility and authority to individuals and families so that they can customize services and supports to meet their unique needs. The Self-Directed Service model provides opportunities to recruit, hire, retain and train their own employees (called Self-Directed Employees, SDE). The Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) recently created the Office of Education on Self-Directed Services. Patricia ("Tricia") Brennan will share her office's mission and initiatives and answer your questions.

**Website:** [https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_blwAXXDzTFqJNeuT8\\_gCQQ](https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_blwAXXDzTFqJNeuT8_gCQQ)

***RFSPC May Statewide Meeting*** May 14 / 10:00 am - 3:00 pm  
Liquid Church, 299 Webro Road Parsippany, NJ 07054 United States

### Free

Moving Ahead through the Endemic, Coping with Continued Challenges in a Productive Way 10AM-12PM Morning session: Given the virus is unlikely to disappear completely, the COVID-19 is becoming less "front-and-center" for some people. Some of us found that increased flexibility and options, such as telehealth, virtual meetings, and parents as paid staff, have become an essential part of their new lives. Many of us continue to face various barriers to access to services. We are delighted to welcome state leadership to our AM session (10AM to 12PM) of our May Statewide meeting. They will share promising practices and areas of improvement. A panel discussion and Q&A will follow.

#### 1) **VIRTUAL attendance (Zoom)**

- You will receive the Zoom link once you registered.

#### 2) **IN-PERSON attendance** (Liquid Church, 299 Webro Rd, Parsippany, NJ 07054)

- Up to 50 people (The Regional Family Support Planning Council Members are given priority to in-person seats.)
- Registration is required by May 5. People who are not registered may be turned away.
- You will receive the Zoom link, in case you experience an unforeseen schedule change (but please cancel your registration so that someone else can attend).