



# Around the Circle

## IMPACTFUL GOALS

Volume 1190

I am feeling conflicted at this moment. A little scared, excited, and definitely hopeful. I *should* be relieved to take my child to her first day of school. I mean, I am the **only** teacher that she ever has known. She needs a teacher with more experience because I don't think my teaching methods are working like they should. I came to that conclusion a week ago. I had been trying to get her to sound out her letters, but after *only 5 minutes* of working with my daughter on the alphabet she started to rock back-and-forth....faster and harder, then swung her arms around and yelled. My ears rung for 10 minutes! I had been getting frustrated a lot recently because I hit a brick wall with her education that I can't get past. It wasn't long after hitting this wall that my friends recommended I enroll her in school, after all there the new law passed that allows my daughter to have a place in the public school classroom. Trained teachers will know much better than I do how to get around the wall I've hit. This is great, so why am I so scared? These thoughts are flooding my mind and I am almost at the school's office. From there I get the class number and then, well.....will the teacher treat her well? Will the teacher know what sounds and movements my daughter uses to communicate for her different wants and needs? What if I forget to tell the teacher something important? I should just go back home. This is a mistake. (Hand on the office doorknob. Stops and shakes head "no".) No, I have to do this for my daughter to grow and develop. I asked the office staff for my daughters classroom number and she stated that her class is outside in the portable. I thought, don't jump to conclusions, just head out there and check it out. But, why is she separated from her non-disabled peers? (Walked outside to the portable area pushing the wheelchair her daughter is confined to and stopped in shock.) Did they not know that a lot of disabled children have problems walking! Why would they put the classrooms on unpaved lots that are nothing but clumps of weeds and sugar sand? Fight through it. Let's go! (Pushes chair with extreme difficulty, in the growing Florida heat up to the classroom building.) I made it! Stairs?! (Pulled chair up backwards into the classroom.) No way! There is no organization to this room. No learning posters on the wall. Just a tv playing a cartoon video tape. The students out number the teacher by 15:1. How will she handle it if there is a situation? She definitely will not have enough time to give to my daughter. No time means no understanding how she communicates and learns, and it is so hot! No air?! Do they think these children are animals, that their comfort doesn't matter? I have a choice, but what about parents who don't? I hate to leave any of them in this room, but I will not be leaving my child here today, nor anytime I can foresee.

This story happened 30 years ago. Although our country and our educational system has made great strides since then, when a new client enrolls into our day program they reflect that there is still a long way to go in receiving a quality public education. An education that equips them for transition into independent adulthood. Most of our clients test at only a 3rd or 5th grade level and have no concept of monetary value. Many have not been equipped with the skills to tend to their environment in a way that keeps it and them hygienic and safe. Further, most of our new clients have not even attempted to cook nor have they engaged in any activity that would help them understand how to follow a recipe, store food properly, know if food was outdated, or know if their food contained an allergen that was harmful to them. Our Society should have a *unified goal* to provide an education for people with disabilities that equip them to live with independence as safely and productively as possible. This may entail extending educational funding to day programs like ours that offer focused lessons for independence. Whatever the plan is to be implemented; a plan to include lessons to equip children with disabilities with skills for independence is an impactful goal for the entire country!

By Crystal Higbee

JANUARY 2024



### Inside this issue

#### Page 1

-Civic Story

#### Page 2

Stay in the Know

-Upcoming Events

-Operations

-Building/Staff Updates

#### Page 3

What's P.O.P. 'n

-Program updates

-Student News

#### Page 4

Resources

-Various resources for special needs individuals and families

#### Page 5

Sponsors & Supports

-Current years' sponsors.

-Current Grantors

## Stay in the Know!

### Welcome to Our Circle!

The Circle welcomes Sabrina Clark as the new Executive Assistant. Sabrina is new to the area, from Jacksonville.



The staff, along with the members of the Board, have been hard at work behind the scenes trying to raise the 1.1 million needed to complete the purchase of our new building. We have a few great fundraising events coming up and have begun our sponsorship partners campaign, It is vital that our community gets behind us to help us get over the threshold. Once we have secured our building we will begin working towards our IDD supported living community development.

You can help us build a stronger and more diverse community. And make a difference in the lives of the disadvantaged. Please visit our website at [www.circleoffriendsministry.com](http://www.circleoffriendsministry.com) for more information on how **you** can become a sponsorship partner.



<https://www.secure.qgiv.com/for/gcff/restriction/CircleofFriendsMinistryConnieJenFriendsFund>

### Post with Us!



Find your next employee  
or  
Disability-friendly business by  
visiting us at

[https://  
www.friendsworklist.godaddysites.com](https://www.friendsworklist.godaddysites.com)

If you have a disability and are looking for a job and would like to post your resume and Bio on our website, please email [info@circleoffriendsministry.org](mailto:info@circleoffriendsministry.org)

Let us know what job you are looking for. We will promptly contact you with further details and instructions.

### Let's Get to Work!

We have seen many clients with various degree of abilities come through the P.O.P. day program. Some have moved on to work in the community. We have found placement of our students difficult due to a few factors. The clients were limited to positions inside businesses within a 3 block radius of the program. Businesses outside the immediate area were unaware of our client's wishes and ability to work. The potential employers were limited to employee options that were presented by staff advocates. In order to get information of our IDD clients and other community members with IDD in front of a wider range of employers we had to think outside of the box. That is when we came up with the Friends Work List website. This website promotes people with disabilities wishing to work by allowing employers to review employment candidates resumes and profiles. It also helps families find businesses who support people with disabilities. This website is a great tool for employers who are looking to improve diversity in the workplace.

## What's P.O.P.'N?



Tim Tebow's annual Night to Shine prom, is just around the corner! First Baptist church of Lake Wales will be one of the official hosting sites. Visit their website at [fbclw.com](http://fbclw.com) for more information. First Presbyterian of Lakeland will be a second hosting site. Contact First Presbyterian at [nighttoshine@FPC.com](mailto:nighttoshine@FPC.com) for more information if you will be attending NTS at this site.

A great place to look for dresses include the Lake Wales and Dundee Care Center as well as your local thrift shops downtown.

First Baptist Church had a limited supply of dresses for ladies looking on a budget. Please contact Pam Lunsford for more information. (863) 676-3436

The January 2024 Calendar is out! Visit us online to print out a copy of your student's activities.

Friendly reminder to parents; we bowl once a month, so be sure to have your student wearing appropriate footwear on those days!

## Welcome New Instructors & Instructor Assistants

Due to the growth of the P.O.P. program we have hired 2 new Program Instructors and 2 Instructor Assistants. Make sure to introduce yourself to Lauren, Reagan, and Lilly. Our goal to provide a quality program for our students that is safe and adequately staffed with team members who are enthusiastic about their job and who are capable to meet the unique needs of each client.

P.O.P. Welcomes three new students to the group!

Landon Callahan who loves to sing and is fascinated by cars and keys.

Meredith Imbasala who has a great talent on the ukulele and a wonderful voice for all music genres.

Diane Fierra who loves to craft and be part of interacting with her peers.



## Upcoming Events

### Men & Guns Clay Shoot Fundraiser



The Circle is working on bringing a fundraiser to the community that our MEN can enjoy! Please tentatively mark your calendars for a March Clay Shoot.

Details will be available on our website February 1st, 2024. Follow us on Facebook for other updates and information.

Facebook.com/  
circleoffriendsministrylw

### Valentine's Date Night

February 9th

Parents are encouraged to take advantage of our respite activity and enjoy a romantic night out without the worry. The Circle will be having dinner and a movie for any family who signs up with a loved one who has disabilities.



Drop-off time is at 5pm

Pick-up time is no later than 9pm.

**Participants MUST RSVP on our website to attend!**

Purchase your tickets today!  
[www.circleoffriendsministry.com](http://www.circleoffriendsministry.com)  
Click on the *Events* Page

### Mother/Daughter Tea & Brunch

May 11th, 2024 11am-2pm

Back by popular demand!

The Circle is once again hosting our Mother's Day Tea and Brunch. Tickets sell quickly for this event so you will want to purchase your tickets early. Treat your mother or child out to a unique experience where time seem nonexistent as you sip one of our choice beverages, delight your taste buds with an array of tea sandwiches, enjoy the spring salad and fun desserts. Get to know your loved one with our fun games and take home a prize if you win. Capture the moment in time in our serene photo area. Then make plans to return next year!



Information about early purchase and group discounts is available on our events page when you opt to purchase your tickets.

## Reaching Hands Support Group

The Circle is teaming up with the LWPD to bring the community a new resource to aid in positive interactions between people with disabilities and law enforcement officers. Officer Troy Schulze will be presenting a new resource that the department will be training with and then implementing for the improved safety of all community members. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to attend the meeting to see if the new resource is a good fit for their loved one with disabilities. The members of the public will have a chance at the end of the presentation for questions, answer, and suggestions. Don't miss out on this opportunity to keep your loved one safe and our officers informed.



---

If you are a parent or caregiver of a loved one with intellectual or developmental disabilities we welcome you to join us every 3rd Friday from 7pm-8pm at the Circle for our monthly support group meeting. Network, build friendships, and share resources. Call Crystal at (863) 679-2507 for more details.

---

## Apply for Aid

Families are encouraged to apply for the Med Waiver for their disabled children. If you are approved for this resource your child can receive funding for a companion and service coordinator. Your child will be assigned a team to help him/her reach goals. These services will improve the quality of life for the child and the family. Visit [apdcare.org](http://apdcare.org) and click on services and apply for waiver services. Email the Central Florida Regional Contact with any questions about the application process.



### **We are Hiring!**

If you are looking for a part-time job to augment your income and would love to help us advance our mission, then please come into the office or call to inquire about our open positions!

- Driver
- Instructor Assistant
- Gardener

PREMIER SPONSORS

- **Give Well Community Service**
- **Mountain Lake Community Service**
- **ER Jahna Foundation**
- **Votum Foundation**
- **Truist Foundation**
- **Church of the Good Shepherd**
- **Bell-Barnett Foundation**



Follow us on social media

Like us, send stars for our video clips, and share on Facebook.

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/circleoffriendsministrylw](http://www.facebook.com/circleoffriendsministrylw)

Sponsors & Partners

- Care Center of Lake Wales
- Florida's Natural Growers Foundation
- Impact Church
- First Baptist Church of Lake Wales
- First Presbyterian Church of Lake Wales
- Thompson Wealth Advocates
- Tower Lakes Chapel
- Debbie Alderman
- Mr. & Mrs. Hartshorn

Contact us by Phone (863) 679-2507 or Email: [info@circleoffriendsministry.org](mailto:info@circleoffriendsministry.org)



Circle of Friends Ministry, Inc.  
333 Lime Avenue  
Lake Wales, Florida 33853

PLEASE  
PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE