



Friendship Fuels the Soul



Those Kids Did Ok!

My husband and I love Halloween. But this month was particularly special because it marked the 35th year of us being together. In 1990 my husband and I went on our first date. We were both quite eclectic kids as anyone who knows this can probably imagine BUT somehow, we knew that we would make a good team and we have.

Little did we know the challenges we would face. Of course, every couple has their unique journey, but ours is layered with an additional gift that requires us to remain good stewards of each other and our family. It is quite difficult to explain the many hurdles we overcame to ensure our daughters were healthy and whole but looking back I do not believe either one of us would change courses.

Raising a child and supporting an adult with autism spectrum disorder is a gift. And like any good gift- the joy that comes from it is never ending.

Those kids did OK!

Inspiration!

Every year I am honored to attend Learning Independence for Tomorrow LiFT's RISE Awards. (If you have not heard of LiFT, please review the link below. They have an incredible history based on equitable education for all.)



Educational program founded by mothers of children living with neurodiversity to empower them into achieving independence.

[Learn More](#)

The luncheon is special because it honors everyday people and organizations doing the right thing just because!

The City of Clearwater received the Commitment award for dedication to the Autistic population. The city of Clearwater is working on becoming the second Autism certified city in the United States. This designation will allow families living in and traveling to Clearwater a higher degree of confidence when they go to restaurants, hotels, attractions, or other public accommodations. That peace is absolutely priceless.



The City of Clearwater is setting an example for inclusivity, by aiming to become one of the nation's first Autism Certified Cities.

[Read All About It](#)



Become an Autism Certified City (ACC)

[Learn More](#)

The Tampa Bay Rays received the Compassion award for their fiscal commitment to LiFT Academy and for their Reading with the Rays program. The reading initiative is most important because, like all children persons with individual disabilities need support retaining and enhancing their skill set. Also, what more encouragement do you need if you have a famous baseball player reading to you!

Reading With the Rays event at LiFT!

[Watch the Video](#)



Lastly, Joshua Felder received the Courage award.

Now, I've met many many people on the Spectrum, but I must say Joshua is truly a unique individual. He possesses that confidence that we want all of our children to exude. When you meet him he engages with you as if he has been a public speaker his entire life. Joshua, who goes by the name Swagman is an ambassador for best buddies, an actor who performed at the Super Bowl with The Weekend and an actor best known for his role in the Champion with Woody Harrelson.



"Spotlight: Best Buddies Global Ambassador"

[Read The Article](#)



[Follow Joshua on Instagram](#)

In a world where sometimes achievements in the disability community are not celebrated it was beautiful to spend time with those who cherish and not just tolerate the neurodiverse population

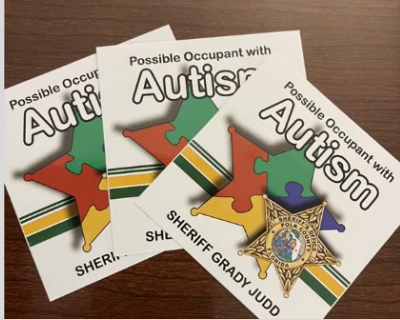
EDUCATION Leads to Safe Interactions

Progress takes time. As a mother of a person on the spectrum, I can honestly say there's been an evolution of thought over the past 15 years on the capabilities of persons who are neurodiverse. When our daughter received her driver's license, like many parents, we were extremely concerned about what would happen if she ever had an interaction with an officer. Although you train your children to be respectful, interactions with police officers can often be stressful. For a person on the spectrum with a communication disorder misunderstandings can escalate quickly. We have wonderful officers in the Bay Area who want to learn how to engage appropriately with the autistic population and it was good to hear that Tampa is taking an additional measure

to ensure progress continues.

The city is considering providing Autism ID cards, which would allow persons on the spectrum to share their preferred level of communication and give officers the opportunity to evaluate a person on the spectrum with the appropriate care required. While it is not a perfect solution because every individual on the spectrum is unique – hence why it is a spectrum – it is certainly a start.

Hopefully it becomes a template for best practices.



Tampa could soon offer autism ID cards to help bridge the gap with police

[Learn More](#)

Office of Civil Rights

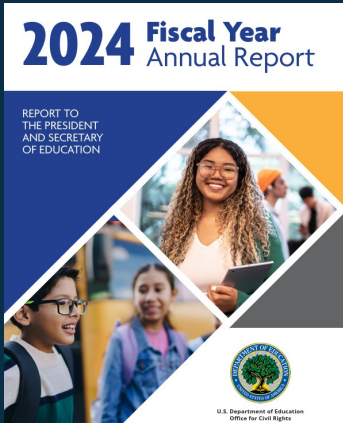
For the past 15 years I have diligently attempted to educate students of all ages and stripes in and out of the classroom. My first student was my oldest daughter Jordan Chloë Jackson who taught me two very important lessons early on in life.

First- “Mommy - the word NO is a complete sentence”. She literally said this at 2 pm.

Second- “Mommy - reading is fundamental - pass it on”.

Thanks Jordan!

So with so much going on in education at the federal level I decided to take some time out to read the Office of Civil Rights, (OCR) 2024 Fiscal Year Annual Report.



2024 Fiscal Year Annual Report

REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

U.S. Department of Education

[Read The Report](#)

As a gentle reminder the OCR is the federal organization dedicated to supporting equity in education.

OCR remains steadfastly committed to using all the tools legally available to

ensure that education is provided to all, on equal terms.

“Catherine E. Lhamon
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights”

As an organization, the OCR protects students against discriminatory practices and Investigates reported and unreported violations.

The OCR also educates institutions receiving federal funds on their responsibilities.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1972 prohibits disability discrimination; and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits disability discrimination in State and local government services – regardless of whether programs receive federal financial assistance.

Knowing your rights is a crucial step in advocacy. Regardless of how you support the Individuals with invisible disabilities - the more each of us knows the better we ALL are.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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